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HELWYS AND BAPTIST ORIGINS

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JOHN SMITH, THOMAS HELWYS,  
AND THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH  
IN ENGLAND



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JOHN SMITH

THE SE-BAPTIST

THOMAS HELWYS

AND THE

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH IN  
ENGLAND

WITH FRESH LIGHT UPON THE  
PILGRIM FATHERS' CHURCH

BY

WALTER H. BURGESS, B.A.

111

THE BAPTIST CHURCH

IN ENGLAND

AND THE PILGRIM FATHERS' CHURCH

LONDON

JAMES CLARKE & CO., 13 & 14 FLEET STREET

1911

WILLIAM A. BROWN

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## PREFACE

THE approach of the three hundredth anniversary of the planting of the first Baptist Church in England would seem to make this a fitting time for setting out its history and recounting something of the life and work of its founders. The scarcity of the books issued by those who were instrumental in gathering this church makes the task by no means an easy one. In some cases the known copies are only to be counted by ones and twos. For this reason I have made large quotations from the original works in the following pages, which gives to several of the chapters the appearance of mere compilations. If the works of Smith and Helwys had been more accessible to the general reader a continuous narrative based on their statements would have been given, but in view of their rarity it seemed better to let the authors speak for themselves on vital points. In a measure I have done for these pioneers of religious freedom what Benjamin Hanbury did for the early Independents. Thus the reader can form his own opinion of their works. The arbitrary spelling of the period has been modernised in the longer extracts, but in the shorter ones the original form has frequently been retained. In the course of this story some fresh light is thrown upon the early history of the church of the Pilgrim Fathers. I hope to give a separate account of

## Preface

John Robinson, the pastor of that church. A free use has been made of dates. Most people abhor them, but they save space by enabling the reader to fit the person or incident dated into the right place in the time-scheme and thus to supply for himself the proper background and historical setting.

Well nigh half a century has passed since Benjamin Evans made known to English students the documents in the archives of the Mennonite Church bearing on our subject. No excuse is needed for drawing the attention of a fresh generation to their importance.

In conclusion I desire to acknowledge the kindness of the librarians of the Bodleian, British Museum, Cambridge University, Dr. Williams's, Sion College, and York Minster libraries in giving me facilities for research. I also thank Principal S. W. Bowser for the loan of books from the library of the Baptist College at Nottingham, and those Anglican clergy who have given me access to parochial registers, and lastly Dr. Fleischer and the Rev. Carel J. Stroër for ready help in connection with the Mennonite archives at Amsterdam.

WALTER H. BURGESS.

LOUGHBOROUGH.

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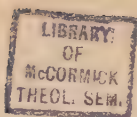
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# JOHN SMITH, THOMAS HELWYS, AND THE PLANTING OF THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH IN ENGLAND

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION — RELIGIOUS SETTLEMENT UNDER ELIZABETH — THE PURITAN AND BROWNIST MOVEMENTS

THE rise and growth of the religious societies organized separately from the Church of England in the days of Elizabeth and James was a matter of more than passing importance. The movement had lasting results. The ideas which found expression in these new Churches profoundly influenced the subsequent religious life of very many English-speaking people both in Britain and America. The bold experiments made by the Separatists in the way of ordering and governing a 'Church of Christ' have helped to mould the polity of the Congregational and Baptist branches of the Church Universal, and have not been without effect even upon those who favoured the Presbyterian order. The story of Robert Browne has frequently been told. The place which John Greenwood, Henry Barrowe and John

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

Penry took in the early Separatist movement has been justly estimated and is matter of common knowledge. The prose epic recounting the history of John Robinson and the Church of the Pilgrim Fathers, as given in the writings of William Bradford, is one of the most familiar stories in the whole range of religious history. But, so far, no one seems to have attempted to trace in a comprehensive way the fortunes of that Church of Christ set up at Gainsborough from which the Pilgrim Church at Scrooby sprang. No one has shown the widespread influence of the teachings of John Smith, who was its founder. His work was of capital importance. It has never been adequately recognized. William Bradford, it is true, puts his name first in his inimitable narrative, but he was more concerned with the company that drew round Brewster and Robinson, and soon lost touch with Smith. The eminent antiquary Joseph Hunter had a glimpse of the true order of development, but Smith was too downright and absolute to attract him, and he quaintly says, "I wish we had a person to deal with at this beginning of the nonconformist roll of ministers on whom the mind could dwell in a more calm and discriminating approbation."<sup>1</sup> The fullest treatment of his life is that given by Dr. Henry M. Dexter, in his "True Story of John Smyth, the Se-baptist," Boston, 1881, but in that little treatise attention is mainly centred on the relatively unimportant act of Smith's self-baptism. In the following pages an effort is made to draw together into a connected narrative such information about John Smith and his immediate followers as can now be gleaned. The man is revealed in his books.

<sup>1</sup> Hunter, *Founders of New Plymouth*, 1854, p. 32.



## Scope of the Inquiry

We must study him in his works. We shall thus keep close to the personal element in the story, and at the same time by examining the books issued by himself and his opponents we shall see more clearly the guiding principles of the Separatist movement. Smith was an engaging and forceful personality. He influenced Richard Clifton, who is fancifully supposed to have been the originator of the Church of the Pilgrim Fathers.<sup>1</sup> He influenced ministers like John Robinson and Hugh Bromehead, and such laymen as Thomas Helwys and John Murton. Both Congregationalists and Baptists, therefore, have an interest in his fruitful labours and formative ideas, for here we have leaders and founders honoured in both communions.

Before entering upon the details of Smith's life and work it will be helpful to take a rapid survey of religious affairs under Elizabeth. The movement led by Smith will then be seen in better perspective and against its proper background. We must distinguish and disengage three strands in the religious life of the time with each of which Smith came into touch. There was the main body of Anglican churchmen prepared to accept any moderate settlement of religious affairs; there was the strong Puritan party profoundly suspicious of Roman Catholicism and earnestly desirous of a further reformation of the English Church; and lastly there was the obscure Brownist or Barrowist movement in which, without tarrying for the prince to move, the members took upon themselves the high task of setting up the Church of Christ anew according to the order which they found laid down in the New Testament.

<sup>1</sup> See Professor E. Arber's *Pilgrim Fathers*, 1897, p. 51.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

When Elizabeth came to the throne affairs in Church and State were in a most confused and unsettled condition. With the prosperity and order of the latter part of her reign nearer to our view we are apt to lose sight of the precarious situation she had to face at her accession. The violent changes in religion effected in the preceding thirty years—Henry's break with Rome, the promulgation of Protestantism by Somerset under Edward, the restoration of Catholic worship under Mary—had disturbed men's minds. There was a crying need for some settlement in religion. People were sore and angry at the meddlesome oppression of the bishops during the reign which had just come to such an inglorious close. The problem was how to secure a settlement that would not altogether snap the links of connection with the past, that would include the bulk of Englishmen within its scope, and at the same time be capable of regulation in the interests of the Crown and the State. Elizabeth, together with a proper sense of her own dignity and power, had the statesman's gift of gauging the general sentiment of her people. She instinctively felt that an episcopal form of Church government on the old lines was more in keeping with the genius of Englishmen than the plan of the reformed continental Churches. Besides, it was more to her own taste. She was always less Protestant than her Parliaments and less a Reformer than the leading members of her Council. She shrank from the nascent democratic ideas implicit in the new Protestantism, and clung to the old order as more in keeping with the aristocratic and feudal systems of local administration which the country had not yet outgrown. In deep and earnest religious

## Religion under Elizabeth

convictions she was singularly lacking. To emotional piety she was a stranger. It was not in her nature to understand the intensity of conscientious religious feeling which glowed in the hearts of some of her subjects. It baffled her, and consequently she was annoyed by its manifestation. We have here the key to her lack of sympathy with the Puritan movement.

But still, though Elizabeth conformed to the Catholic worship under Mary, she came down, warily yet distinctly, on the Reformed side of the fence at her accession. This was clearly recognized. It became evident at once that Elizabeth was in many respects an apt scholar of her father. She was resolute against any external interference with her Church. In the announcement of her accession to the sovereigns of Europe the Pope was deliberately ignored. She would not, indeed, take the title of "Supreme Head" of the Church—a designation offensive to Catholics and Protestants alike—but accepted that of "Supreme Governor," and regarded it as something more than a courtesy title. She could rate her bishops like a drill sergeant. Alone amongst English sovereigns before or since she dared to suspend an Archbishop of Canterbury.

By the royal proclamation enjoining the reading of the lessons, creed, litany and Lord's Prayer in English in the churches, those of the old religion could see which way the wind was blowing. But Elizabeth did not wish to outrage the feelings of moderate Catholics. Preaching and expounding the gospel were restrained, and the iconoclasm of zealots who took matters into their

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

own hands was repressed.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it was the Queen's policy to make conformity easy for her Catholic subjects. This is obvious from a glance at the alterations now made in the Prayer Book. A crucial example is afforded by the sentences of administration in the Communion Office.

The great test question in the days of Mary had been that of the Real Presence of Christ in the sacrament. The examination of those arrested for religion always centred round this point. Minor differences of belief were overshadowed by this grand article. It comes up with wearisome iteration in Foxe's Book of Martyrs, and obscures the fact that there was a rich and healthy variety of opinion amongst the martyrs. How then was this grand question dealt with by Elizabeth and her advisers in the religious settlement? The First Prayer Book of Edward VI., 1549, had this formula :

"The body of our Lorde Jesus Christe whiche was geuen for thee preserue thy bodye and soule unto euerlasting lyfe,"

while the Second Prayer Book of Edward VI. (1552) had in place of it the simple commemorative sentence :

Take and eate this, in remembraunce that Christ dyed for thee, and feede on him in thy hearte by faythe with thankesgeuing."

At the instance of Elizabeth the two sentences were tacked together in the revised Second Prayer Book of Edward, which was now restored. And thus at the

<sup>1</sup> See the Orders of the Privy Council, March 29, 1559, and April 18, 1559, in relation to cases at Hailsham, Sussex ; Bow Church, London, and the parish church, Dover.



# The Anglican Settlement

heart of the most sacred service of the Book of Common Prayer the worshipper is presented with a piece of astute but clumsy patchwork typical of much else in that great compilation.

## THE ANGLICAN SETTLEMENT

In the first Parliament of the reign (January 25, 1559—May 8, 1559) the legal religious settlement was effected. The Act of Supremacy securing the position of the Crown as governor of the church, and providing against foreign interference in ecclesiastical matters and the “Act for the Uniformity of Common Prayer and Service in the Church and Administration of the Sacraments” (April 1559) were quickly passed. No particular attention seems to have been paid to the protestations of Convocation and the bishops against these measures. The Commons disposed of the Act of Uniformity in a couple days. In the Lords, where the spiritual peers voiced their opposition, the business was got through in three days. On the following June 24 (St. John the Baptist’s Day) all the churches of the realm were to adopt the new service book.

This policy of Elizabeth and her advisers certainly met with considerable success. The great mass of clergy and people tamely acquiesced in the settlement. Outward conformity was as much as the Queen cared for and the laws relating to religion were not harshly administered. Catholics might reflect that the Council of Trent had not yet concluded its deliberations and there was no telling what it might not sanction. Protestants had gained a great point in securing the service

# Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

in English and hoped for further reformation. The precarious position of England in the affairs of Europe made men feel that they must hold together at home. And after all, by contrast with the preceding reign, it seemed to be a time of liberty and peace in matters of religion.

## THE PURITAN MOVEMENT

It is obvious that a religious settlement, dictated and controlled in the main by state policy, would not satisfy the more earnest minds. Men of conscience, whether Catholics or Reformers, were ill at ease under its terms. In the eyes of the general public the Roman Catholic opposition to the religious settlement had a distinctly political complexion. This was confirmed for the great body of Englishmen when Pius IV. forbade observance of the provisions of the Act of Uniformity, and still more when Pius V. promulgated a bull (February, 1570) deposing Elizabeth and absolving her subjects from their allegiance. For this reason the Catholics were usually proceeded against as political offenders, though, no doubt, conscientious religious conviction was in most cases the motive for their opposition to the law. The Puritan or the nonconformist was left to be dealt with by the spiritual courts and the commissioners for ecclesiastical causes, and it is his case with which we are more concerned.

Already during the time of Mary lines of cleavage had begun to manifest themselves amongst the religious refugees at Frankfort. The more rapid production and circulation of the Bible and its general use in public

## The Puritan Movement

worship proved stimulating to thought. The leaven of new ideas was steadily working amongst the middle classes, especially in the towns and at the Universities. The influence of the reformed Churches of the continent, where bishops were at a discount and the doctrine of the parity of ministers was upheld, made itself strongly felt in England through those who now returned from exile. A habit of looking to the New Testament as a guide in matters of Church order as well as matters of faith, was being formed. The religious refugees from England became convinced that the simple service and government in the "best Reformed Churches" of Scotland and the continent were nearer to the New Testament model than the forms set up in the Anglican Church. So great was the rebound from Roman Catholicism that anything savouring of "Rome" was abomination in the eyes of the thoroughgoing reformers. Hence their rooted aversion to the vestments. To wear the square cap and surplice seemed like an endorsement of the whole papal system. It was not the vestment itself, but what it stood for in the eyes of the world that mattered. "Though the surplice in substance be indifferent," they said, "yet in the present circumstances it is not." In this matter circumstances altered the case. The bishops were sorely troubled to secure uniformity in the use of clerical vestments, and numbers of clergy were suspended for refusing to conform to the regulations. From questions of apparel and 'Popish ceremonies,' the reformers moved on to consider the nature of the episcopal office, the supposed need of being ordained by a bishop, and the right ordering and ruling of a Church.

Cambridge became a great centre of Puritan feeling.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

Under the lead of Thomas Cartwright (1535—1603), who strenuously advocated a complete clearance of all relics of Popery and a strict adhesion to New Testament rules for the governing of the Church, the nonconformists increased and grew more bold. They had no desire to separate from the Church. In their judgment the national Church only needed a further reformation to make it perfect. Again and yet again, when Parliament met, efforts were made to secure legislation to curb the power of the bishops and spiritual courts, relax the terms of subscription and allow a greater liberty to ministers in the conduct of worship. But these efforts were fruitless. The Queen regarded such attempts as a meddlesome interference with her prerogative, and sharply commanded the Commons to leave the reform of religion alone.

With the failure of their endeavours to secure reform by constitutional methods "the forward ministers," as they were called, had to resort to a voluntary reform. They evaded obnoxious ceremonies where they could, and relied on the strong Puritan feeling of their parishioners for support. Already the clergy of Northamptonshire had mapped out a scheme for ruling their parishes and ordering their services independently of the canons of the Church. This was only an example of what was going on elsewhere. In many quarters the ministers who desired a further reformation entered into voluntary associations, and met regularly for "prophesyings" or gatherings, at which some passage of Scripture or some question of divinity was discussed in an orderly method. These "classical meetings" formed an excellent training ground for the

# The Primacy of John Whitgift

Puritan ministry. They helped to a thorough knowledge of Scripture, afforded opportunity for friendly interchange of opinion, and gave scope for the exercise of self-restraint and the development of business-like habits under the firm guidance of the 'moderator' or chairman. Some of the bishops looked on these gatherings with a friendly eye. But the Queen looked on all "meetings" with suspicion; they might too readily be turned into hot-beds of political agitation. She had no difficulty in finding bishops of her mind to put them down.

## THE PRIMACY OF JOHN WHITGIFT

The primacy of John Whitgift, who succeeded Grindal as Archbishop of Canterbury in 1583, was a trying period for those who could not conform to the requirements of the Book of Common Prayer and the canon law of the Church. Whitgift received his marching orders from Elizabeth. He was "to restore the discipline of the Church and the uniformity established by law," which, in the judgment of her Majesty, had "run out of square." Whitgift went to work with a will to set matters straight. In the first week of his primacy, September, 1583, he issued his famous three articles to which all who held ecclesiastical office had to subscribe on pain of deprivation for refusal. In December, 1583, he prevailed on the Queen to appoint, on her own authority, a new Ecclesiastical Commission with wide powers. He was resolute in maintaining the liturgy and ceremonies of the Church. As he held the metropolitan see for twenty years he was able to give continuity to his policy. He kept the field long enough

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

to allow of the growth of a party sincerely attached to the Book of Common Prayer, and gradually wore down some of the vehement Puritan opposition. Even Cartwright was reduced to some sort of conformity in the end. But Whitgift did not kill the Puritan movement. What he did was to drive some of the Puritan feeling underground, and by dashing all hope of any immediate reformation of the Church from within, he prepared the way for the setting up of more thoroughly reformed Churches altogether separate from the Established Church and independent of episcopal jurisdiction.

The Puritans met the persecution with remarkable patience. It might be wondered that separate Churches were not formed in greater number and by more of the prominent leaders of their party. But the way of the Separatist was a hard road to tread. The idea of setting up a Church independent of the parochial system was entirely novel. It was not against a national Church, but against its abuses, that the Puritan protested. Indeed, the Separatists found their bitterest controversial opponents amongst the Puritan ministry. Gifford of Malden wrote against Browne ; Cartwright pleaded with his sister-in-law to leave the Brownists, and wrote against Harrison ; Bradshaw and Hildersham contended with Johnson, Bernard with Smith, Ames with Robinson. The Puritan found, in controversy with the Brownist, an easy way of showing the world what a loyal son of the Church he really was ! The Precisians or Puritans formed a strong party within the Church. They attracted to their side many earnest men. The movement associated with their name, though primarily religious, had a political aspect, and those who desired



# The Brownist or Barrowist Movement

to strengthen the hands of Parliament as a check to despotic power in the Crown naturally threw the weight of their influence on the reforming side. The years were speeding on, and those who sought a further reformation in the Church were buoyed up during the later years of Elizabeth with the hope that on the accession of James of Scotland to the English throne there would be a change of policy in the direction they desired. It would be folly to cut themselves off from the Established Church, or to allow themselves to be thrust out from it, when there was a possibility that in a few short years, backed up by the support of a king from Presbyterian Scotland, they might capture that Church for their party and reform it according to their mind.

## THE BROWNIST OR BARROWIST MOVEMENT

There was probably never a time in English history when men and women interested in religion did not foregather apart from the services of the official Church to confer by speech or reading about the matters that touched their lives most closely. The mediæval guilds of the merchants and craftsmen partook of a religious character and gave ample opportunity for fraternal intercourse. In the days of Wiclif meetings were held in many districts at which the "gospellers" read and expounded the Scriptures. The missionary meetings of the Augustinian friars had an element of spontaneity about them which made them unconventional. Even in the time of Edward VI., when the Protestant cause was in the ascendant, we find some who were not fully satisfied meeting privately for prayer and reading. The

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

records of the Privy Council tell how certain men of Kent crossed the Thames estuary at Christmastide in 1550, and together with some in Essex "assembled for scripture matters in Bocking." They had made some sort of separation from the Church for they admitted that they had "refused the Communion above ij yeres." Under Mary there were secret gatherings of ardent reformers at which "the service book of King Edward VI." was used. Those dissatisfied with the religious settlement under Elizabeth had not far to look back for examples of separate meetings. But it is doubtful whether any of these irregular assemblies was organized as a separate Church or ever regarded itself as a Church complete and entire. Their separation was an accident due to the necessities of the times and not a plank in their platform or a matter of principle. They were waiting a turn in the tide of affairs, and on the accession of Elizabeth the members of these assemblies resorted once more to their several parish churches.

But when it became clear that the reform of the Anglican Church was not going to be carried very far, a company of friends in London took the bold step of forming a separate society. This was spoken of in 1567 as "the Privye Church in London." A paper under the hand of its minister "Richarde Fytz" throws light upon its aims and principles. This document declares that the true Church of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ has or strives to have :—

"*First and foremost*, the glorious word and Evangel preached not in bondage and subjection but freely and purely.

"*Secondly*, to have the Sacraments ministered purely only, and altogether according to the institution and good word of the Lord Jesus, without any tradition or invention of man.

## Robert Browne

*"And last of all, to have not the filthy Canon Law, but discipline only and altogether agreeable to the same heavenly and almighty word of our good Lord Jesus Christ."*

It will be seen that the main objections to the Elizabethan religious settlement concerned the restraint upon preaching, the equivocal communion service of the new Prayer Book and the retention of the Canon law inherited from Catholic times and enforced upon the clergy instead of the discipline of the New Testament. The minister and deacon of this London church died in prison, and its history is obscure. It may be that some of its members rallied to the side of John Greenwood and helped to form the Separatist Church which came into prominence in London under the leadership of Henry Barrowe (1550—1593) John Penry, Thomas Settle, William Smith, and Francis Johnson. The story of this Church and its sufferings has been frequently told, and we shall not dwell on it here. At a later stage in our narrative we shall meet with it in exile at Amsterdam. Through its pastor, Francis Johnson, it exerted a strong influence upon John Smith with whose life and labours we are more immediately concerned.

We have briefly spoken of the Separatist movement in London ; meanwhile, in the provinces a similar Separatist Church had been formed at Norwich under the leadership of Robert Browne (1550—1633) and Robert Harrison.

Browne had literary gifts of no common order. Well born and well educated, he lifted the Separatist movement into public notice, both by his writing and preaching. He had the command of a clear and vigorous English style. He had the faculty for systematizing, together with a good measure of that intrepid spirit

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

which all pioneers need. The fact that he ultimately conformed and held a benefice in the Anglican Church brought both him and his writings into poor repute amongst his old friends. His books have suffered undue neglect. I place his writings next to those of Penry in power of literary expression among all the Separatist pamphlets of Elizabethan times.

As the number and weight of those who separated from the Anglican Church increased a name was needed to distinguish them. The Anglican Churchman knew the "Papist," and he knew the "Precisian" or "Puritan," but here were men of a new order, and it was necessary to describe them by some convenient phrase. "Anabaptist" and "Sectary" were handy terms of abuse, but though freely used were hardly exact enough. Consequently the terms "Brownist" and "Barrowist" were coined. Browne and Barrowe were the leading literary champions of the cause. The latter was a vehement and discursive writer—and no wonder since he wrote from prison—the former was the first to set out in print with clearness the principles upon which the Separatist Churches were built up. The term "Barrowist" soon died out, but that of "Brownist" lived on as it met a need in the language. We use it in a historic sense. Once, indeed, it was a nickname, and as such was justly resented, but all the sting has long since gone from the word. It has become a convenient symbol to indicate those who, in the days of Elizabeth and James, followed the principles of Church government and order so carefully extracted from the books of the New Testament and set forth by Robert Browne.

## CHAPTER II

### JOHN SMITH'S CAREER AT CAMBRIDGE — FRANCIS JOHNSON AND THE LONDON SEPARATIST CHURCH

THE story of the planting of the first Baptist Church in England touches the religious life of the land at many points. It brings us into connection with prelates and Puritans, conformists and Separatists, heady enthusiasts and sober Dutch Mennonites. But it circles most closely round the lives of three remarkable men, John Smith, Thomas Helwys, and John Murton, whose work left a permanent mark upon the religious life of English-speaking peoples. In recounting what is known of these men the story of the movement in which they were leaders will be told, for with them religion was the supreme interest in life, and religious motives controlled and determined their general action. Within the brief space of six years they separated from the Church of England, formed a distinct religious society, fled for refuge from persecution to Amsterdam, advanced to the opinion that baptism as administered in the Anglican Church was unlawful, and reconstituted their church by a fresh baptism. Then Helwys and Murton separated from Smith, and, becoming convinced that it was wrong to flee from persecution, returned with a handful of followers to plant their Church in London.

Of John Smith's boyhood and birthplace nothing is

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

as yet certainly known. It is difficult to trace the history of anyone bearing such a common name unless there is some contemporary statement as to his family and place of origin. It is true his name is frequently given as "Smyth,"<sup>1</sup> but this variant on the more usual form of the word affords no real help in making a search for particulars of his early life. From a casual reference to him by the Rev. Joseph Hall, afterwards Bishop of Norwich, who was a contemporary of his at Cambridge, it may be inferred that he was domiciled in Lincolnshire at the time when he came up to the University. It seems to me probable that he belonged to a family of Smiths which had a connection both with that shire and the neighbouring county of Nottingham. His parents were of sufficient standing to allow their son to go up to the University, and he himself had made such good use of his opportunities as to be ready to profit to the full from a course of collegiate training. But the fact that he matriculated as a "sizar," that is to say, as a student of the lower rank who received food and instruction at a reduced fee, and rendered in return certain services in Hall, indicates that his family was of no great wealth, and betokens a desire on his own part to gain instruction. He matriculated at Christ's College, Cambridge, in 1586, and we may infer from this that he was born early in the eighth decade of that century. Unfortunately the admission book at "Christ's" only begins in 1622, so we get no clue as to his birth place or parentage from that source. In the library of this

<sup>1</sup> In the entry of matriculation at Cambridge, March, 1586, it is written "Smythe." Peile's *Biographical Register of Christ's College*, 1911, p. 185.



## Life at Cambridge

college is a magnificently bound volume with vellum leaves, apparently presented by the foundress, Margaret Beaufort (1443—1509), mother of Henry VII., for use as a register. It was too good to be used, and its leaves are blank to this day.

Christ's College, established by a royal licence in 1505 converting "God's House," an older foundation, into a regular college, was at this time a nest of Puritanism. It sent out a constant stream of energetic Puritan preachers and writers. Sir Walter Mildmay, the founder of Emmanuel College, had studied here. John Udall, who died in prison unjustly suspected of being concerned in writing the Marprelate Tracts, was a member of "Christ's," so also were Walter Travers, Laurence Chaderton and William Perkins, all awakening Puritan preachers. At this college Arthur Hildersham and Richard Bernard, with whom John Smith came into conflict in after years, were students. They suffered much for Puritanism, but refused to separate from the Church. In this they contrasted with another notable member of "Christ's," Francis Johnson (1562—1618), who boldly advanced from Puritanism to the Separatist position, and was chosen as pastor by that Church of Christ in London which afterwards took refuge in Holland.

When Smith went up to the University Francis Johnson had completed his college course. He had come up from his native Richmond in Yorkshire in the spring of 1579, and entered Christ's College, graduating in 1581, and proceeding to his Masters' degree in 1585. He was elected Fellow and engaged in tutorial work. It was in this connection that Smith and Johnson were brought into close touch, for we learn that Francis

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Johnson was his tutor. Years afterwards, in the preface to his "Paterne of True Prayer," when he was wavering in his allegiance to the Anglican Church, John Smith referred to these days. "From some of them," he says, "which Seperate from our Church concerning the Set forme of prayer I received part of my education in Cambridge," and Richard Bernard<sup>1</sup> expressly tells us that Johnson was Smith's tutor.

Cambridge was agitated at this time over questions concerning the status of the ministry and the right ordering of the Church. The controversy concerning the ecclesiastical habits which had raged in the earlier part of the reign had given place to a wider dispute, which touched the whole constitution of the Church. It was held by the Puritan party that the New Testament laid down a form of Church government, and discipline far different from that imposed upon the land by the strong will of Elizabeth, and now more rigidly enforced than ever by the energy of Whitgift. Those who desired a further reformation in religion were aided by many who, for political reasons, wanted to differentiate the Church of England more decidedly from Roman Catholicism. The arbitrary action of many of the bishops made men ready to accept the Presbyterian theory of the parity of ministers, and the abuses connected with the system of patronage gave rise to the demand that the people should have a voice in the calling and election of those who were to minister to them in holy things. Thus there was a strong party for reform in the country, and the

<sup>1</sup> Bernard's *Separatists Schism*, p. 38. This is confirmed by Wm. Bradford, "Mr. Johnson, who had been his tutor." Young's *Chronicle of Pilgrim Fathers*, 1844, p. 450.

## An Awakening Sermon

agitation had an active centre in Cambridge. The Puritans, with their tendencies to democratic institutions, instinctively looked to Parliament as the means for effecting reform in religion. Only a few months after John Smith entered the University the Puritan party introduced a Bill (February 27, 1587) into the new Parliament embodying their desired reforms together with a "book" which would have altered the whole form of the Church of England. The Queen peremptorily stopped the proceedings, and when some of the members ventured to reopen the matter promptly sent them to the Tower. It was difficult to argue against action of that sort.

Now, it was while these questions of Church reform were the leading topics of the day that Francis Johnson boldly handled them in a sermon at St. Mary's, Cambridge, on January 6, 1588. He took as his text 1 Peter v. 1—4, "The elders which are among you I exhort who am also an elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof not by constraint but willingly; not for filthy lucre but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." A fine text for a Puritan sermon. Johnson laid it down that the Presbyterian form of Church government was most agreeable to the New Testament, and therefore to be preferred before Episcopacy. For this bold utterance he suffered imprisonment.<sup>1</sup> After

<sup>1</sup> For details of this case see Brook's *Puritans*, vol. i., p. 396, and vol. ii., pp. 89 *et seq.*, articles on Cuthbert Bainbrigg and F. Johnson.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

twenty weeks he petitioned Burghley for release. He was then brought up for re-examination on October 19, 1589, and required to recant. This he did on the following Sunday, but insufficiently in "mincing terms," and was therefore ordered on October 30 to leave the University. He refused to go, declaring his sentence to be utterly unjust. Accordingly he was again imprisoned, December 18, 1589, and though a petition<sup>1</sup> was presented to the Chancellor on his behalf signed by many members of the University, yet he soon had to leave. The College allowed his stipend to Lady Day, 1590, after which his name ceases from the list of Fellows. From Cambridge he went over to Middelburg and became minister to the English merchants there, a post once held by Thomas Cartwright. He had not, so far, separated from the Anglican Church. He was a Puritan profoundly dissatisfied with its constitution and harshly treated by its officers, but he still held communion with it and hoped for its reform.

The hard case of Francis Johnson would excite a chivalrous interest in one of such an impulsive and sanguine temperament as Smith. He would look for news of his old tutor and take special note of his career. And what a strange career that was! One would have thought that Johnson would have been happy enough in ministering to the English merchants in Middelburg, who granted him £200 year, an extremely handsome stipend for those days. The town authorities allowed his congregation the use of the Gasthuis Kerk.

<sup>1</sup> Dated December 23, 1589. Lansdowne MS. 61. pp. 56—67. Smith's name does not appear on this petition. Among the signatories we may note William Perkins, Cuthbert Bainbrigg, and Richard Wright.

## Johnson at Middelburg

His predecessors in office, Cartwright and Dudley Fenner,<sup>1</sup> had moulded the congregation on the Presbyterian plan with which he himself was in full sympathy. But though all seemed favourable for a long settlement a change was impending. Johnson was soon to take the further step from Puritan nonconformity to actual separation from the Anglican Church. This was brought about in a curious way. We have the account from Bradford.<sup>2</sup>

“Mr. Johnson, himself, who was afterward pastor of the ‘Church of God’ at Amsterdam, was a preacher to the company of English of the Staple at Middelburg, in Zealand, and had great and certain maintenance allowed him by them, and was highly respected of them, and so zealous against this way [of the Separatists] as that [when] Mr. Barrow’s and Mr. Greenwood’s Refutation of Gifford was privately in printing [1591] in this city, he not only was a means to discover it, but was made the Ambassador’s instrument to intercept them at the press and see them burnt. The which charge he did so well perform, as he let them go on until they were wholly finished and then surprised the whole impression not suffering any to escape, and then, by the Magistrates’ authority, caused them all to be openly burnt, himself standing by until they were all consumed to ashes. Only he took up two of them, one to keep in his own study, that he might see their errors, and the other to bestow on a special friend for the like use. But mark the sequel. When he had done this work he went home and being set down in his study, he began to turn over some pages of this book and superficially to read some things here and there as his fancy led him. At length he met with something that began to work upon his spirit which so wrought with him as drew him to this resolution, seriously to read over the whole book, the which he did once and again. In the end he was so taken and his conscience was troubled so, as he could have no rest in himself until he crossed the seas and came to

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<sup>1</sup> Fenner had died at Middelburg towards the close of 1589.

<sup>2</sup> Young’s *Chronicles of the Pilgrim Fathers*, pp. 424–5.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

London to confer with the authors, who were then in prison, and shortly after [April 6, 1593] executed; after which conference he was so satisfied and confirmed in the truth as he never returned to his place any more at Middelburg, but adjoined himself to their society at London and was afterwards [Dec. 5, 1592] committed to prison and then banished. And in conclusion coming to live at Amsterdam he caused the same books which he had been an instrument to burn to be new printed and set out at his own charge. And some of us here present testify this to be a true relation which we heard from his own mouth before many witnesses."

The accession of Johnson to the ranks of the London Separatists gave them fresh heart. They proceeded to set their Church in due order and elect officers. Francis Johnson was chosen and ordained pastor (September, 1592); three months later he was seized at the house of Edward Boys a wealthy haberdasher on Ludgate Hill and thrown into prison in the Clink. Not long afterwards Boys died, and then in the year 1594 there was a "report" that Mr Francis Johnson "was a suitor to Mrs. Thomasine Boys,"<sup>1</sup> his widow. The suit was successful and they married by mutual consent in the prison according to the Common Law of the land in the presence of witnesses. When this became known Johnson "was clapt up close prisoner again by the Arch-bishop of Canterbury" and not allowed to go abroad as before with his keeper. Mistress Johnson's womanly love for dress becoming her style and station was a source of grievous offence to her brother-in-law George Johnson, then prisoner in the Fleet, and led to a laughable yet pitiful dispute between the brothers.

<sup>1</sup> G. Johnson's *Discourse of Troubles, etc.*, 1603, p. 95. The only known copies are in Sion College Library and Trinity College Library. I have examined both.



## John Penry's Advice

By this time a goodly number of Johnson's flock had fled to Holland. A severe Act "to retain the Queen's subjects in obedience" had been passed in April 1593. It was expressly directed against the Separatists and designed to punish "persons obstinately refusing to come to church or persuading others to impugn the Queen's authority in ecclesiastical causes."<sup>1</sup> Those convicted under this Act were committed to prison; three months were then allowed them to decide to attend some parish church and make a public recantation at service time; if they refused they were to leave the Queen's dominions never to return without her special licence. Penry in view of this Act wrote a remarkable letter to the brethren on April 24, 1593. It contained the final advice of a man standing in the shadow of death for conscience' sake. They were to sink their individual interests and study the welfare of the whole Church.

"My good brethren, seeing banishment with loss of goods is likely to betide you all, prepare yourselves for this hard entreaty and rejoice that you are made worthy for Christ's cause to suffer and bear all these things. And I beseech you in the bowels of Jesus Christ that none of you in this case look upon his particular estate, but regard the general state of the Church of God that the same may go and be kept together whithersoever it shall please God to send you. Oh! the blessing will be great that shall ensue this care."

Some of the members of this "distressed congregation" sought an asylum in Holland in the autumn of 1593. By the operation of the new Act others kept coming to them as their term of three months' imprisonment expired. They first pitched at Kampen, moved thence

<sup>1</sup> Neal, i., p. 426.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

to Naarden, where they received some charitable help from the magistrates, and finally settled at Amsterdam. This last remove I assign to the end of 1595 or beginning of 1596. We have a picture of these refugees in 1597 by a candid yet not unsympathetic observer. In this we see them already disturbed by wrangling. Some had actually moved on to the Anabaptist position. This glimpse of the exiles is furnished by John Payne in a treatise in which he gives "Christian Exhortation" to different sections of his countrymen. He devotes a section to "Nordeners."

"Likewise you my countrymen of another kind and company, removing from Campen [Kampen] to Norden [Naarden] and from thence to Amsterdam, and now miserably rent and divided and scattered here and there; who, though you hold the fundamental points of our faith with affection to good things, yet it is with an untempered zeal."

He urges the remnant who had not run into "fowle errors" of anabaptistry "to be less lofty and more lowly, to esteem better of God's Churches about you and to brag less of your own—without Pastor and sacraments for these 3 years."<sup>1</sup> Without the guiding and restraining hand of their pastor a spirit of contention invaded the Church. Trouble arose through wielding "the sharp sword of excommunication." The exiled Church would not choose new officers but sought direction by letter from its imprisoned leaders in London. The connection between pastor and Church was regarded as good for life.

It may be asked how it was that Johnson did not

<sup>1</sup> *Royall Exchange, Haarlem 1597, ad fin.*

## The Call of the New World

come over to Holland at the expiration of three months' imprisonment. Well, he with others was already under arrest when the Act for retaining the Queen's subjects in obedience came into force, and he was not proceeded against under its provisions. He was kept in ward for over four years. The authorities hardly knew how to deal with him. Not until the autumn of 1597 did Johnson manage to rejoin his flock. The reunion was brought about in a singular way. In the spring of 1597 one or two Merchant Adventurers planned a voyage of fishing and discovery to Rainea in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Chief of these was Charles Leigh, himself a Separatist "who called the Pastor's wife 'cousin,'" <sup>1</sup> and Abraham van Herwick. They petitioned the Queen for permission "to transport out of this realm divers artificers and other persons that are noted to be sectaries." This was a friendly device in which Francis Johnson and his companions concurred; in fact, they themselves petitioned the Privy Council to influence the Queen to allow them to go to "the province of Canada where by the providence of the Almighty and her Majesty's favour we may not only worship God as we are in conscience persuaded by his word, but also do unto her Majesty and our country great good service, and in time also greatly annoy that bloody and persecuting Spaniard about the Bay of Mexico." Already the thoughts of the Separatists turned to the New World as a possible place of refuge. The idea was kept in mind.

This suit was granted. Four prominent Separatists—the brothers Francis and George Johnson, Daniel Studley, a ruling elder of the Church, condemned to death at the

<sup>1</sup> *Troubles, etc.*, p. 106.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

same time as Barrowe, but reprieved, and John Clerke—were permitted to join the expedition. But the Merchant Venturers had to give bond that these Separatists would not return to the Queen's dominions unless they grew content "to live in obedience to her laws ecclesiastical for matters of religion."

The brothers were assigned to different ships, as they had been to different prisons, Francis and Studley to the *Hopewell*, captained by Charles Leigh himself, and George, with Clerke, to the *Chancewell*, under Stephen van Herwick. The vessels had cheery names. They put out from Gravesend on April 8, 1597, and it must have been an immense relief to leave the noisome prisons behind. Detained by head winds at Falmouth, George Johnson endangered himself by his indiscreet discussion of religious topics with the mariners and master of his vessel, and by publicly showing a copy of the Separatist's "Confession of Faith" while in port. At last, with a favouring breeze, they left the Channel and made for America. If a permanent settlement had resulted from this expedition no doubt the members of Johnson's Church would have crossed from London and Amsterdam to join their pastor, and the Pilgrim Fathers would have been anticipated. But that was not to be. The mercantile marine in Elizabethan days was strongly Protestant, and entered on any plan of privateering against the Spaniards with something of the holy joy of the old crusaders. A raid upon Spanish shipping promised more immediate profit and excitement than the drudgery of planting a settlement. A sharp look-out was, therefore, kept for Spanish shipping. The two ships kept

## A Naval Crusade

together across the Atlantic and made Cape Race. Off Placentia Bay they lost touch with one another. The *Chancewell* got on the rocks "in a faire sunne shine day" off Cape Breton, and the captain having to beach her for repairs, she was plundered by the French. The crew were left ill-furnished, but had saved their boats. They prepared to set out down the coast in search of help or in hope of taking a prize. G. Johnson and Clerke must either go with them, or be left in the wild or be delivered "to the Frenchmen to be brought for France and by them on ship borde they should be urged to hear masse."<sup>1</sup> "Three hard choices," says Johnson. But help was at hand; the *Hopewell*, after some adventures with the French, now happily made the same landfall as her sister ship. We will let George Johnson describe the event:—

"Continuing in that wild place three or four days, while they prepared their shallops and made ready as well as they could to take purchase. God's providence, who never faileth, no, not in the mountain or wilderness, shewed itself, for the Captain walking with George Johnson and conferring of these things, suddenly (being quick sighted) he saw a ship far off in the sea and said, 'I see a ship,' to which G. Johnson said, 'It may be the Lord will send us help thereby,' and requested the Captain to man out a shallop to them to signify our shipwreck and distress unto them, and no doubt the Lord would move their hearts to pity. Which presently the Captain commanded to be done and, we still walking under hope, at length one, who was very quick eyed, discerned it to be an English ship, and put us in hope that it was our fellow which was bound to make the same journey with us, which made the mariners to hasten the more with their shallop, who, coming to them, finding them to be the ship which was bound with us (wherein were the Pastor and Mr. Studley the other two banished), and relating to them the distress wherein we were.

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<sup>1</sup> *Troubles, etc.*, p. 109.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

Oh! what heaviness was there among them, specially in the Pastor, for his brother and in that loving man, Mr. Charles Leigh the Captain thereof, who was not so heavy for the loss (though a principal of the ship was his) as he was joyful that all the men were safe. And presently (by report) commanded the Master to make to the bay where our distress was, at whose meeting what tears there were (not for the loss) but for joy that we so met, specially between the brothers I cannot express, yea, I cannot now write without tears, remembering such a wondrous providence of God even in a strange land."<sup>1</sup>

The whole company were taken on board the *Hopewell*, and on July 25 they had the luck to fall in with and capture "a notable strong ship" of Belle Isle, of near "200 tons burthen." Leigh, with his Separatist friends and a ship's company, were transferred to the prize. They had hopes of making a further capture, but putting to sea again early in August they found their tackling so rotten and their victuals so short that they resolved, after a few days, to make straight for home. The company in the *Hopewell*, anxious not to lose their share of the plunder, determined to return at the same time. As they sailed back over the Atlantic the religious refugees whiled away the time with discussions which sometimes grew heated, being fomented by Studley, who, "lying in his cabbings would now and then put forth his head and minister questions and matter to the Pastor,"<sup>2</sup> reminding George Johnson by this action of "a barking dog." On approaching the English coast the refugees would have to consult as to their safety. Studley proposed to the captain that he should keep George Johnson close on ship board for a time on arrival in port, as they feared his indiscaction. This plan he refused to entertain.

<sup>1</sup> *Troubles, etc.*, p. 110.

<sup>2</sup> *Troubles, etc.*, p. 112.



## In Perils by Sea and Land

The prize ship arrived off the Isle of Wight on September 5, and Leigh, with his four friends, landed and rode up from Southampton to London, leaving the master mariner and crew to bring their ship round to the Thames, "where she was made prize."

George Johnson tells us the course of events: "Being come to London, and everyone in several lodgings for the more safety, that if one came in trouble yet the other might escape, after a day or two they [*i.e.*, Leigh, Studley, and Francis Johnson] sent Mr. [Thomas] Bishop<sup>1</sup> to George Johnson to certify him that it was known they were in the City, and that he must provide to go forthwith to Gravesend tilt boat, where Mr. Studley would meet him and go with him." Accordingly George went off to Gravesend. He only had ninepence in his pocket, and sixpence of this he paid for his fare to Gravesend. Daniel Studley and his brother Francis did not come along for some three or four days, and George had worked himself into a fine fever by the time they arrived, upbraiding them in his captious way, and wanting to know how they thought he was going to live. They said he might have gone to the house of one of "the brethren" who lived three or four miles from Gravesend, and they would have sent for him when they came down. The next day they took ship for Amsterdam together, and got safely over to that haven of refuge, rejoicing to meet the brethren already settled there with their "teacher," Henry Ainsworth, and their "ruling elder," Matthew Slade. Thus, after long severance, the Church once again enjoyed the presence of its pastor, Francis Johnson.

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Bishop married a sister of George and Francis Johnson.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

Such, then, were some of the trials and adventures that befell the tutor of John Smith. We need not wonder that the younger man received from him a decided bent in the Puritan direction. Smith would look with interest for any news of Johnson that filtered through to Cambridge, and would doubtless be an eager reader of his books. He was acquainted with Johnson's "Treatise of the Ministry of the Church of England, wherein is handled the question whether it be to be separated from or joyned unto," discussed with Arthur Hildersham and issued in 1595. He was influenced by the "Brief Declaration of the ordinary officers of the Church of Christ," and "Some notes touching the Lorde's Prayer," annexed to this volume. He was also aware of Johnson's controversy with Henry Jacob (1563—1624), put to the press by the latter in 1599<sup>1</sup> and replied to by Johnson in 1600. We may also take it that Smith was an attentive student of the Separatist "Confession of Faith," in which Francis Johnson had a master hand. No doubt he would reflect upon the questions at issue and discuss them with his college friends.

All that is known of John Smith's career at Cambridge may be set out in few words, and we will here conclude the story of this stage in his life. No record of his taking a "bachelor's" degree is found, as the lists for 1589—90 are irrecoverable, but he became Master of Arts in 1593, and was elected to a Fellowship before Michaelmas, 1594. At this period he took "orders." We have his own word for this. Writing to Richard Bernard in 1609, he said :—

<sup>1</sup> *A Defence of the Churches and Ministry of Englande*, Middelburgh, 1599. *An Answer to Maister H. Jacob, his Defence, etc.*, 1600.

## Smith at the University

"I utterly renounce your orders which I had from Wickham, prelate of Lincoln, when I was chosen Fellow of Christ's College in Cambridge."<sup>1</sup>

This is confirmed by Bernard, who declares that Smith "was made minister by Bishop Wickam."<sup>2</sup> These passages are important because they identify the John Smith in whom we are interested with the one who held a Fellowship at "Christ's" from 1594 to Lady Day, 1598. William Wickham was Bishop of Lincoln from 1584 to 1595. These dates shut out two other John Smiths who were at Christ's College near that time. If we may trust Bernard, who appears to be well informed, Smith "was instituted into a living," but the place and nature of his benefice have not yet been determined. I have searched the scanty memoranda of Bishop Wickham's institutions and ordinations preserved in the Alnwick Tower at Lincoln, but no references to John Smith remain.

It appears that John Smith was for a time engaged in tutorial work, in which he was occasionally assisted by Samuel Ward, catechist of the College, and afterwards Master of Sidney Sussex. There are one or two references to him in a manuscript note-book left by Ward, from which it is clear that Smith was looked up to as a collegian of some standing. Ward notes under the date June 28, 1596, his "too lavish speeches to Mr. Smyth." On August 28 in the same year he reproaches himself for "my want of attention and applying Mr. Smith his commonplace to myne owne profit." Again, on August 16, in the following year, he speaks of "my

<sup>1</sup> *Paralleles, Censures, etc.*, p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> Bernard, *Plaine Evidences*, 1610, pref.

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coldnes att prayer in Mr. Smith his chamber," and then, on "Bartholomew day," reproaches himself for "my thoughte of pride in that Mr. Smyth [was] with me."<sup>1</sup> These entries show that Smith was one who took an active part in the work of his College. The diary also refers to William Perkins, Cuthbert Bainbrigg, Thomas Newhouse, afterwards of St. Andrews, Norwich, and Will. Bolton, to whose "puples" it was Ward's duty to read, and I take it John Smith would be well acquainted with all in that little circle.

Smith was at Cambridge, then, for an unusually lengthy term. It was a stirring period, when religious discussion was vigorously pursued. The points in dispute between Travers and Cartwright on the one hand and Whitgift and Hooker on the other were being more sharply defined. It was a time when William Perkins (1558—1602) a fellow of "Christ's" was preaching with amazing success as lecturer at Great St. Andrews. Smith would have opportunities of discussion with William Ames (1576—1633), William Bradshaw (1571—1618) of Emmanuel, and John Robinson of Corpus Christi. We may safely conclude that this part of his life at Cambridge under the sympathetic guidance of Edmund Barwell, Master of Christ's College, made a deep impression upon his mind. It was now that his thoughts were directed to those inquiries into the nature and constitution of the true Church of Christ which eventually led him to throw off his allegiance to the Church of England and gather a new Church in accordance with the New Testament plan.

<sup>1</sup> MS. diary of Sam. Ward in Sid. Suss. Coll. Library.

## CHAPTER III

### PREACHER TO THE CITY OF LINCOLN—EXPOSITION OF THE 22ND PSALM—LECTURES ON THE LORD'S PRAYER

“First hee [*i.e.*, Smith] was a Subscriber, a Conformitant, and as honest a man then, as ever since for anything seene or heard hitherto to the contrary: this is evident when first hee was made Minister and when hee was instituted into a living. Whether wholly a Conformist he best knoweth, it is enough that he was what he was.”<sup>1</sup>

THOSE were the words of Richard Bernard, who is probably right in his suggestion that John Smith was not wholly a conformist even at the time of his ordination. Like Bernard himself, he was then a Puritan to whom many of the ceremonies and several parts of the Book of Common Prayer were thoroughly distasteful. This was the class of clergy most subject to interference and suspension by the bishops. From this class the town lecturers and preachers were usually drawn. One can see how natural it was for the more resolute Puritans to take up positions as chaplains and lecturers over which the bishops had less direct jurisdiction than over ordinary benefices. Such were the lectureships set up in cities and market towns and supported by the subscriptions of the townsmen or a grant from the

<sup>1</sup> *Plaine Evidences*, 1610, Preface.

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corporation funds. If John Smith had suffered any interference at the hands of Wickham's successor in the see of Lincoln he would be the more likely to seek such a post. Now, the corporation of Lincoln had appointed Thomas Luddington, M.A., a Lincolnshire man and a Fellow, from 1582 to 1605, of Lincoln College, Oxford, to the post of "preacher to the City." They agreed (June 16, 1597) to pay him "£30 per annum and his diet at the mayor's table." He served this office for some three years, but, as I judge, not with entire satisfaction to all parties. At any rate, on May 3, 1600, the question of the post of city preacher was reviewed and a resolution passed in these terms :

"No minister or preacher who shall have any benefice or charge out of the City of Lincoln to be elected preacher of the City, but such a man to be chosen as shall have no benefice and lie and be continually amongst the citizens."<sup>1</sup>

This was paving the way for Smith, and on September 7 of the same year Mr. John Smith was "elected preacher of the city by 8 voices over Mr. Luddington who had 7." The narrow majority indicated that feeling was pretty evenly divided and did not promise a very comfortable time for the new man. However, Smith entered on his fresh duties in good heart. We have it on the testimony of Governor William Bradford that he was "a good preacher." He would find the work congenial and be well able to hold his own. So long as he had the support of the Corporation he would feel safe against undue interference from the bishop and enjoy considerable liberty in ecclesiastical matters.

<sup>1</sup> *14th Report of Hist. MSS. Commission, Appendix, Part VIII., on Lincoln Archives, 1895.*



## Smith at St. Peter at Arches, Lincoln

On October 21, 1600, the Corporation resolved that—

“Mr. John Smith, the preacher of the city,” was “to have a yearly stipend of £40 paid quarterly, with £3 6s. 8d. yearly towards house-rent and leave to keep three kine upon the commons.”

That was quite a satisfactory allowance, and we may picture John Smith happily settled in Lincoln city, engaged in regular preaching on Sundays and Wednesdays. Some fruits of these labours he afterwards gave to the press.

Was he married at this time? I think it very probable. The Protestant party in the towns favoured a married ministry. Nine years later in Holland his name was closely coupled with Mary Smith, who, it is natural to assume, was his wife. The vacation of his Fellowship in 1598 may have been due to his marriage.

As to the character of his preaching at Lincoln we have a fair example in a little volume of expository sermons, “printed by John Legat, printer to the Universitie of Cambridge.” It was published some time after March 24 in the year 1603. It is entitled ‘The Bright Morning Starre, or the Resolution and Exposition of the 22nd Psalme, preached publickely in foure sermons, at Lincolne by IOHN SMITH, Preacher of the Citie. Apoc. 22, 16: ‘I am the roote and the Generation of David and the Bright Morning Starre.’” Then comes Legate’s imprint, followed by the information: “And are to be solde at the signe of the Crowns in Paul’s Churchyard by Simon Waterson.” The only copy known is in the Library of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, to which it was presented by William

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

Sancroft,<sup>8</sup> Archbishop of Canterbury. Smith addresses his "Epistle Dedicatorie" "to the Right Worshipful religious and courteous Knight, Sir William Wray, my approved good friend and benefactor." He gives him "salutations in the Lord Jesus," and states his reason for this dedication in these terms:—

"Because I have experienced yourself to be, under the King's Majestie, a principal professor and protector of religion in these quarters (for what a multitude of faithful ministers are debtors to you in the flesh), and for that I, among the rest, have rested under your shadow."

Smith thought there was room for more books of a serious order.

"Seeing every bald tale, vain interlude and pelting ballad hath the privilege of the press, the sermons and readings of ministers may challenge the same. The world is full of 'Guy of Warwick,' 'William of Cloudeslee,' 'Skoggins and Wolners Jests,' and writings of like qualities; and therein men take a great delight to read and so make themselves merry with other men's sins. . . . I think the Stationer's shop and some men's shelves are better furnished with such trifles, which deceive the mind and affection as the bait doth the fish, than with wholesome writings of nature, art or religion."

Accordingly, Smith ventured to publish this little work. The style is plain and direct, and the pages are not overloaded with marginal references, but the treatment in the fashion of the time is diffuse. Smith says:—

"I have not varnished my writing with the superficial learning of words and figures, tongues and testimonies of men (which notwithstanding I do not disallow), but, because I purposed to apply my style to the understanding of the simple, I endeavour to utter matter with all plainness of words and sentences."

## Psalm 22 Expounded

As a matter of course he applied the words of this psalm to Christ according to the conventional interpretation of the Church in his day. "The argument of the Psalm,"<sup>1</sup> he says, "is a description of the estate of every true Christian and godly heart, in the person of David, also a type of the sufferings and glory of Christ."

He goes through the whole psalm verse by verse, treating each point in detail. As an example of his style we may take a portion of his comment on the twenty-second verse, "I will declare Thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation I will sing of Thy praise." We shall at the same time see that Smith held the Puritan doctrine of the nature of the ministerial office. The minister of Christ was not a priest, but a "pastor" or "teacher." It will also be obvious that he took the Scriptures as an absolute rule, and regarded "conversion" as the chief function of the ministry.

"The principal work of Christ's prophecy," he says, "is to declare God's name, that is, his excellent attributes and his whole will unto his brethren the Jews, and so to the whole Church. For so this place is brought, Heb. ii. 12, to prove the humanity of Christ, whence we consider that Christ is designed by God the Father for the only Prophet, Doctor and Teacher of the Church. He is the great Bishop of our souls. God hath commanded us to hear him, and he is the only Lawgiver that is able to save and destroy. Which is thus to be understood—that he alone hath revealed His Father's will to the Church, by the ministry of the prophets in the Old Testament, by his own and the Apostles' ministry in the New Testament who spake as the Holy Ghost directed them. For Christ Jesus hath in his breast hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, who is therefore called the Wisdom of God. And therefore we are not to add or detract

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<sup>1</sup> *The Bright Morning Star*, p. 2.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

anything from the written word of God, or to alter any whit thereof, which—whosoever presumeth to do derogateth from the prophetic office of Christ. The scriptures indeed may be expounded, but they must not be altered, augmented, or diminished.

“Hence also followeth it by due proportion that the Ministers and Pastors of the Church, who stand up in Christ’s stead (he being ascended up on high and having given gifts unto men) are to open and publish God’s will (sufficiently revealed by Christ in the prophets’ and apostles’ writings) to the people of God for their conversion and salvation. Finally also, by like analogy, Christians must, without fear or shame, confess and profess the truth of God’s word not only before the friends of the Church and those specially over whom they have charge, but also before the enemies of the Church being called and urged thereunto.

“This is the principal work of Christ’s prophecy—to teach the Church. Now the effects thereof follow, which are: the praise of God and the conversion of men’s souls; which are subordinate each to other, for by the conversion of men’s souls God is glorified.

“(1) The first effect of Christ’s prophetic office, and so of the ministry of the prophets, apostles and pastors of the Church is the conversion of men’s souls; otherwise called the gathering together of the Saints, the edification of the body of Christ.

“(2) The second effect of the prophecy of Christ, and so of the ministry, is the praise of God; for therefore must ministers preach and teach that God may be glorified in the conversion of men’s souls. Thus Christ saith, ‘I honour my Father,’ and again, ‘I have glorified Thee on the earth,’ where the ministers, pastors and teachers of the Church are to learn in their functions to aim at these ends—that they may save souls which is a great point of wisdom, and glorify God which is the end of all things.<sup>1</sup> Where [whence] those pastors are reprobable that seek rather to win their own praise by inkhorn learning, by darkening and obscuring their preachings with the clouds of philosophy and the tongues, drawing as it were a veil before Christ crucified, and covering Moses’ face with a scarf that men should not with open

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<sup>1</sup> Smith anticipates the first answer of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* of 1647—“Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him for ever.”

## Inkhorn Learning

face see the glory of God, than the praise of God and the conversion of men's souls who are rather by this kind of preaching still kept in the dungeon of ignorance and palpable darkness than the Day Star, Jesus Christ, cannot arise in their hearts; so that this kind of preaching is rather to put out than to open the eyes of the blind." <sup>1</sup>

Such expository preaching, delivered with the suasive charm and fervour which Smith had at command, was full of attraction for those seriously interested in religion.

A man of Smith's transparent sincerity and outspoken directness would not be without opponents, and it would appear that in the year 1602 the opposition was gaining strength. Luddington, the former city preacher, was still within reach, and had loyal supporters. "Divers, men of good place," were restive under Smith's searching preaching. His friends felt it desirable to secure his position and not leave it dependent on the annual vote of the Corporation. At a meeting in September, 1602, they passed a resolution for—

"A grant to be engrossed and sealed, assuring for life the stipend heretofore paid to Mr. John Smith, the preacher long since elected to preach every Sunday in the afternoon, and every Wednesday in the forenoon, provided always that he be not absent from the execution of his place above twenty-one days in a year, except it be through sickness or else suits and troubles in law, and during absence that he find another man to supply his place at his own charge." <sup>2</sup>

But in the next month there was a sudden change of feeling. On October 13 there was hot discussion about the matter. It was declared that Smith "is not licensed to preach and is at present inhibited by the Lord Bishop of this diocese from the execution of his ministry

<sup>1</sup> *The Bright Morning Star*, pp. 167—173.

<sup>2</sup> *Lincoln Corporation Minutes*, vol. v., p. 14.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

and preaching." The agreement securing his stipend was revoked, and he was dismissed from his office. The city fathers at once proceeded to fill up the post. "Mr. Luddington was elected preacher of the city by nine voices over Mr. Dalbie for whom none were given."<sup>1</sup> Smith now threatened to bring an action against the Corporation of Lincoln for the payment of his annuity. The Mayor with the consent of his Council made a countermove by exhibiting articles unto the Lord Bishop of the Diocese against Smith "for his erroneous doctrine and undue teaching of matters of religion and personal preaching at men in this city."

Here were the materials for a fine dispute. The opponents of Luddington bestirred themselves at once. It was soon clear that there would be no chance of harmony with either Luddington or Smith as city preacher, and a man of less pronounced opinions was sought. The election of Dalby seemed to be a way out of the difficulty, and though no one voted for him in October, yet on July 8, 1603 he was "elected preacher by 12 voices over Mr. Luddington for whom none were given, to have a yearly stipend of £30 for preaching on Sunday morning and Wednesday afternoons." This appointment was satisfactory, and Dalby retained the office till his place was declared vacant on July 24, 1608.

But the Corporation had not done with John Smith, who was a man of resolute pertinacity. He pressed his claim. At the same time charges were laid against him for some bold and startling utterances concerning the Lord's Prayer which were all too likely to give rise to mis-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18. Richard Smith, attorney, was Town Clerk of Lincoln at this time. Was he a kinsman of John Smith?



## Lord Sheffield, President of the North

apprehension. "I have become strangely traduced," he complains, "for the doctrine I taught out of the Lord's Prayer."<sup>1</sup> The matter in dispute was ultimately referred to Edmund, Lord Sheffield and settled to the mutual satisfaction of those concerned. It was because of this friendly and successful arbitration that Smith ventured to dedicate the lectures, which had been one ground of the dispute, to Lord Sheffield when he put them to the press next year.

"For that your Lordship," says Smith, "had the managing of the cause of difference betwixt my accusers and me concerning this occasion, and for that your Honour so wisely and charitably compounded the controversy on both parts to the contentment of either of us your Lordship might justly challenge a greater title herein than any other whatsoever."

Accordingly the dedication runs: "To the Right Honourable Edmund, Lord Sheffield, Lord Lieutenant and President of His Majesty's Council established in the North."

Edmund Sheffield (1546—1646) was an earnest Protestant. He commanded the ship *White Bear* in the fight against the Spanish Armada. He was designated for the post of President of the Council in the North in the summer of 1603,<sup>2</sup> and was appointed Lord Lieutenant of Yorkshire on August 1 in that year. A letter was directed to him on September 6, 1604, to aid Francis Browne in the execution of the office of Registrar of all ecclesiastical causes within the Province of York. When the civil war broke out Sheffield sided with the Parliament, though it meant a great personal loss. We can understand that Smith would receive

<sup>1</sup> Preface to *A Paterne of True Prayer*, 1605.

<sup>2</sup> *Calendar of State Papers: Domestic Series*, 1603—10, p. 24.

# Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

sympathetic treatment at the hands of such a man, but it is not likely that Lord Sheffield would be at all pleased to have his name connected with a book which Smith himself describes as "so suspicious a writing" and "so dangerous a tractate."

The very title of the work, "A Paterne of True Prayer" indicated the opinion of its author that the Lord's Prayer was designed to be used not so much as a prayer but as a model in accordance with which the prayers of all men should be framed. In the Roman Catholic Church the *Pater Noster* had been grossly abused, and no serious effort had been made to check the popular opinion that some magical efficacy attended its bare recital. The convinced Protestants sought to guard against a repetition of that evil. They discouraged the formal use of the Lord's Prayer and the more strenuous Separatists actually declared it to be wrong to use it in public worship. They did not fully realise the place which it had won in the affections of the people. John Smith's lectures<sup>1</sup> upon this subject "which, not

<sup>1</sup> The title runs: "*A Paterne of True Prayer, A learned and comfortable Exposition or Commentarie upon the Lord's Prayer: wherein the Doctrine of the substance and circumstances of true invocation is evidently and fully declared out of the holie Scriptures.*" By JOHN SMITH, Minister and Preacher of the Word of God.—At London, Imprinted by Felix Kingston for Thomas Man, and are to be sold at his shop in Pater-noster Row at the signe of the Talbot, 1605." I have consulted the fine copy in York Minster Library, also the copy in the British Museum Library, which bears the autograph of "Katheren Wilkenson"; another copy of the first edition is in Regent's Park Baptist College Library. The entry of this book at Stationers' Hall is as follows:—

"22 Martij [1605]

"Master Man Senior	"Entered for their copy vnder the hands of the wardens A booke called A paterne of true Prayer
"Thomas Man Jun."	or exposicon vppon the lord's prayer. Done by John Smythe &c. of Lincoln." vjd.

"Arbers Transcript," iii. 285. Ed. 1876.

This book was reprinted *verbatim et literatim* in a neat and handy form in

## To the Christian Reader

long since" he says, writing in 1605, "I delivered to the eares of a few being then Lecturer in the Citie of Lincolne," are so important for indicating his opinions at this time that we make large extracts and give his epistle "to the Christian Reader" in full.

### "TO THE CHRISTIAN READER,

"Beloved, marvel not that after so many expositions upon the Lord's Prayer this pamphlet steppeth up as if so be it had something to say besides that which hath been already spoken. To confess the truth I guess it may occasion the judicious reader to enter into a more inward view of Christ's purpose in propounding that prayer. Perhaps also the manner of handling the several petitions may give some light. But my intent was none of these. When I intended to publish the treatise only the clearing of myself from unjust accusations and the satisfying of a few friends moved me thereto. But whatsoever it be and howsoever uttered I pray thee of charity to construe (a thing indifferently done) to the better part, especially those few questions resolved in the latter end of the treatise. I do here ingenuously confess that I am far from the opinion of them which separate from our Church concerning the set form of prayer (although from some of them I received part of my education in Cambridge), for I do verily assure myself, upon such grounds as I have delivered in the treatise, that a set form of prayer is not unlawful. Yet, as Moses wished that all the people of God could prophesy, so do I wish that all the people of God could conceive prayer, the rather for that [because] personal wants, blessings and judgments are not comprised particularly according to their several circumstances in any form of prayer possibly to be devised. Wherefore I desire that no man mistake me in this treatise. I do judge that there is no one doctrine or opinion contrary to the doctrine of this

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1624. "London. Printed by J. D. for Thomas Man and are to be sold by William Sheffard, Iohn Bellamie and Beniamin Fisher." The fact that it contained plenty of good sermon material will account for this reprint. Curiously enough, this second edition has frequently been assigned to another John Smith, "Preacher of the Word at Clavering in Essex," who expounded the Lord's Prayer in his *Essex Dove*.

# Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

Church in all this tractate, in respect whereof I hope it shall find more indifferent censure at thy hands. And for that misconceit which some perhaps have entertained at the hearing of the doctrine when I taught in Lincoln, I do also as freely and truly protest that I never durst admit (I bless God for His mercy) so blasphemous a thought into my mind as to surmise whether the prayer commonly called the Lord's Prayer be the prayer which Christ taught his disciples or no. For I do with my soul confess it to be the same prayer in substance which Christ delivered to his disciples. Therefore I pray thee, gentle reader, whosoever thou art, to accept this treatise and to blame necessity rather than me for publishing it. For the phrase and style, it is homely I confess and plain, for I do not intend the benefit of the style to the learned but to the unlearned for the better understanding of the matter. The truth and homeliness may well sort together, and the truth is not to be rejected for her plainness, rather I wish that men in heavenly matters could frame themselves to the capacity of the meanest, which is the surest way, seeing that learned men can understand things plainly delivered, but the unlearned cannot conceive the easiest doctrines except they be delivered also after an easy manner with homely familiar and easy speeches. Now if any man attribute this plainness of mine used in this treatise to ignorance and want of skill I will not endeavour to weed that prejudice out of his mind seeing that I profess it to be a part of my study to speak plainly. And I see no reason that, seeing speech is the interpreter of the mind, the interpreter should [have] need of another interpreter or commentary. So, craving again thy charitable censure, I bid thee heartily farewell in the Lord. Pray for us brethren.

“Thine in Christ Jesus,

“JOHN SMITH.”

Smith first enters upon certain “general considerations” and then descends “to the particular exposition of the words” of the prayer and concludes with certain curious questions which would be fruitful in suggestion to the attentive reader. He was well aware of the opinions of the Separatists on the questions he was handling, but he

## Disagreement with Earlier Separatists

disagreed with them. He was not prepared utterly to condemn the use of prescribed forms of prayer. Even when he himself separated from the Church of England, a few months later, it was more the result of his own thinking than the example of Francis Johnson that led him to take the step. He was too original to adopt blindly all the conclusions of earlier Separatists. The point of difference between himself and the Separatists in 1605 with regard to the Lord's Prayer is brought out in his comment on the words of Jesus in preface to the prayer: "After this manner pray." Those words, in Smith's judgment, were as though Jesus had told men to pray.

"(1) the matter herein contained and (2) with the affections here expressed. . . . Although Christ commandeth not these words, and matter, and method, yet he does not forbid them, for in the whole Scriptures there is no such prohibition. Wherefore Christ leaveth it arbitrary unto us, as a thing indifferent, when we pray, to say this prayer or not to say it, so be that we say it in faith and feeling, or if we say it not, yet to pray according unto it. And this I suppose no indifferent man will deny. Yet there are some (whom we will account brethren though they do not so reckon of us seeing they have separated from us) which think it unlawful to use the Lord's Prayer as a set prayer, or any other prescribed form of prayer, but that they are in a manifest error it may appear by these considerations ensuing. For if it be lawful to use the salutations of Paul, the Psalms of David, and the blessing of Moses, then we may lawfully use the Lord's Prayer or any other prayer in Holy Scripture agreeable thereto for a prayer. For Paul himself used always one manner of salutation ; our Saviour Christ, as is very probable, used one of David's Psalms with his Disciples after the first institution and celebration of his Supper ; and the 92nd Psalm was usually, in the Church of the Jews, sung on the Sabbath Day ; and Moses always used one manner of prayer at the removing of the Tabernacle and another at the pitching thereof. Which evidently serveth for the overthrow of that opinion which they of late have



# Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

devised, contrary to the practice of the Ancient Church and all the Reformed Churches in Christendom, who have an uniform order of public prayer, one and the same almost in the very form of words, and plainly confirmeth us, in the present truth we hold—that it is lawful to use the prayers in [the] Scriptures, or any other prayers made by the Saints of God to our hands consonant to the Scriptures.”<sup>1</sup>

## PERSECUTION

With regard to persecution, which he was destined to experience more keenly in coming days, Smith expressed the view that it was a “sin.” It is a sin “committed upon the persons that worship God and *that* either [upon the persons] of the Preachers or [of the] Professors of the truth, which is a manifest indignity offered even unto God himself: for the Ministers are God’s Ambassadors and every true professor is a member of Christ. Wherefore as the Prince is then disgraced when his ambassador is shamefully intreated, so is the Lord dishonoured in His Ministers and messengers. And as Christ was abused when his body was crucified upon the cross, so is he also now when the members of his mystical body are persecuted.”<sup>2</sup>

## OFFICERS OF CHRIST’S CHURCH

In his comment on the clause “Thy Kingdom come” Smith pauses to consider, “What are the offices and officers of this Kingdom?” His answer is instructive as showing how far he was from being satisfied, even at this time, with the hierarchy and orders of clergy found in the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> P. 84.



## Church Officers

Anglican Church. We may notice, too, that he already speaks in this work of the bishop as “the Magistrate Ecclesiastical.”<sup>1</sup>

“The offices and officers (besides those that were temporary and extraordinary as Prophets, Apostles, Evangelists) are these following :—

“The first office is teaching, and that officer is called a Doctor.

“The second is exhorting, and that officer is called a Pastor.

“The third office is ruling, and that officer is called an Elder ; in the Church of England he is called a Bishop.

“The fourth office is distributing, and that officer is called a Deacon.

“The fifth office is shewing mercy, which officer is called a widow.

“These are all set down Rom. xii. 7, 8.

“The questions that are between the Reformed Churches concerning these offices and officers I, of purpose, spare to handle, being both unfit to debate them and loth to offend. Only I wish that such controversies might be ended by Councils and that the peace of the Church might be kept.”<sup>2</sup>

In drawing his general considerations on the use and abuse of the Lord’s Prayer to a close, Smith wrote as follows :—

“As a man going to build an house will first have a platform or an idea in his head according whereunto he will frame his house so the Lord’s Prayer is an idea or pattern whereby every true prayer is framed.

“Although this be the most excellent and perfect platform of prayer and prayer that ever was devised, yet, considering that it is only a general prayer and hard to be used aright as Christ himself used it, therefore it may seem that a prayer conceived according to this prayer is as acceptable, if not more accepted of

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<sup>1</sup> *A Paterne of True Prayer, Epistle Dedicatory.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

# Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

God than this prayer. For though the Lord's Prayer is better than any other prayer, yet a man may and can and doth use his own conceived prayer better than he can use the Lord's Prayer. And prayer is accepted or not accepted of God according as it is rightly used or abused. And this is profitable for the ignorant people to think upon, considering their intolerable abusing of the Lord's Prayer. Thus much<sup>1</sup> may suffice to have spoken of the general consideration of the Lord's Prayer."<sup>2</sup>

John Smith's main exposition of the several clauses of this prayer was sound and helpful, and would be generally acceptable at the time. But his mind was of an eager, inquiring turn, and he was not satisfied to let well alone. There were certain related topics—"extravagant questions," he calls them—outside the main scope of his theme, in which he was evidently deeply interested, and he reserved them for treatment at the close of his book. The sting was in the tail. The questions would be provocative both of thought and of opposition. They challenged the attention of all formal and slipshod religionists:—

"1. Whether Christ ever prayed the Lord's Prayer ?

"2. How oft Christ used the Lord's Prayer, and how ?

"3. Whether Christ spake all and only the words of the Lord's Prayer ?

"4. How the Evangelists Matthew and Luke differ in phrasing the Lord's Prayer ?

"5. Who prayeth best, he that sayeth the Lord's Prayer, or he that sayeth not the Lord's Prayer ?"<sup>3</sup>

Each of these questions is discussed. He sums up his answer to the second in these terms:—

"Briefly, then, Christ used this prayer twice, but it cannot

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<sup>1</sup> A contemporary annotator writes here indignantly in the margin of the York Minster copy—"Too much."

<sup>2</sup> *A Paterne of True Prayer*, pp. 31—33, 34.

<sup>3</sup> Pp. 178—182.

## Two Versions of the Lord's Prayer

certainly be determined whether he used it oftener, neither can it be proved that the Apostles used it often."

His discussion of the third and fourth questions is instructive as revealing his readiness to face and freely examine some of the difficulties arising from divergencies in the Gospel narratives. In view of his subsequent peculiar opinion as to the use of Holy Scripture it may be well to set out his treatment of these points.

To the question as to whether Christ spoke only the words of this prayer, he says,

"The answer is only conjectural for it cannot be proved that he used the very words set down by the Evangelists. The reason is for that the Evangelists used to set down not all and only the words which Christ spake, but the sum and substance of them. And if it be granted that the Evangelists have done it in other places why may they not do it in this, especially seeing the Evangelists do differ in words in reciting many of Christ's speeches, as, namely, the Beatitudes. . . . And this doth not any whit call into question the truth of Canonical Scriptures, but doth rather commend unto us the spirit of wisdom and truth wherewith they spake, in that divers writers differing in words still agree in matter and substance of doctrine."

Then, after considering the next dependent question as to the differences of the two forms of the prayer, he continues :—

"Now by this difference betwixt Matthew and Luke, which is verbal not material, this consequence ariseth, either that the Evangelists did not precisely bind themselves to the words that Christ uttered, or else that Christ uttered the Lord's prayer in divers words at the two several times when he uttered it."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> P. 181.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

When he draws to a conclusion Smith still feels that he has not exhausted his subject. He says :—

“Divers other doubts concerning the use of the Lord’s prayer may be propounded, but it is not profitable to make doubts, except that they could be well dissolved ; only thus much for a conclusion of this treatise of prayer. I had rather speak five words to God in prayer from understanding faith and feeling than say the Lord’s Prayer over a thousand times ignorantly, negligently or superstitiously.”

With that Parthian shot the work ends. It reveals to us clearly that the writer was far from comfortable in the Anglican Church. In all probability he had already left Lincoln when it was published, and we must now endeavour to trace his further movements.

### NOTE

Since this chapter was written I have made further research in the Bishop’s Registry over the Exchequer Gate at Lincoln. It is clear from the archives there, that Smith was not the rector but only “town lecturer” at St. Peter at Arches. Nor did he trouble to take out a general licence to preach. In this he differed from Richard Bernard, who obtained a licence on February 2, 1599—1600 to preach throughout the whole diocese of Lincoln (Vol. 28, *Institutions of Bishop William Chaderton*, fol. 118b.) Smith is described as “*clericus concionator*”; the rector of the church in his time was Adam Garside, who formally resigned on March 28, 1604. The next day William Dalby was instituted to this rectory, on the presentation of King James, and was granted a general preaching licence. In his case everything was in order (*ibid.* fol. 220b.) The Mayor, John Becke, with Alderman Leonard Hollingworth exhibited articles against Smith in the Bishop’s Court for slander. Consequently, on December 9, 1602 the Bishop appointed a commission to sit in the church of St. Peter at Arches on the 14th, 15th, 17th, and 18th of January 1602—3 to examine witnesses and report on the case. Smith had a poor opinion of the Bishop’s Court, and appealed from it on April 5, 1603, to what he called “competent judges.” There had been some correspondence between Sir Wm. Wray and the bishop about this case. (See the *Act Book*, 1602—9, of the Ecclesiastical Court of Lincoln, folios 30b. 32, 36b, 37b, 40b 41b).

## CHAPTER IV

### SEPARATION FROM THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND—SMITH AND HILDERSHAM—SMITH AND BERNARD

THE course of events in the life of John Smith in the three or four years between the termination of his lectureship in Lincoln and his appearance as pastor of a newly-gathered church at Gainsborough is difficult to trace. The way of a minister suffering under episcopal displeasure was hard in those days. He might get some help from a sympathetic nobleman, and it is possible that Smith was befriended at this time by Sir William Wray of Glentworth and his good wife Frances. He might be sheltered by some brother minister of kindred views, and have occasional opportunities of service in parishes where there was little likelihood of his preaching being reported to the bishop or the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. He would naturally gravitate towards those of similar views to his own, and seems to have gone from Lincoln to the district round Gainsborough and the northern parts of Nottinghamshire. Amongst the small freeholders and craftsmen of this neighbourhood and the ministers of the district there was a strong Puritan element. William Hickman, lord of the manor of Gainsborough, was a thorough-going Puritan. William Brewster, "post" of Scrooby on the great North Road, had done "much good in the country where he lived in

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

promoting and furthering religion, not only by his practice and example, and provoking and encouraging of others, but by procuring good preachers to the places thereabout, and drawing on of others to assist and help forward in such a work, he himself most commonly deepest in the charge and sometimes above his ability." An important section of the Lincolnshire clergy was actively pressing for a further reformation in religion. The ground had been prepared for Smith's labours. He came into the district to find men earnestly discussing the very questions that were occupying his own mind.

The hopes of the Puritans that James I. on his accession to the throne would favour a change in the established form of religion in England, and bring it more into accord with the Presbyterian order prevailing in Scotland, were soon dispelled. The Hampton Court Conference and the elevation of Richard Bancroft (1544—1610) to the see of Canterbury in 1604, and of Tobie Matthew to the see of York in 1606, made it clear that the Puritan party would get no support from the Crown. The State would not lend a hand to help in setting up a pure Church according to the model which the Presbyterians believed to be indicated in the New Testament. Subscription was rigidly enforced on the clergy. The spiritual courts were left in undiminished power. No steps were taken to remove ministers who would not or could not preach. The various rules and regulations which had been issued for governing Church affairs were now consolidated into a formidable body of canons, to which the clergy were to give implicit obedience. All were to toe the line.

The irony of the situation was seen when easy-going



## Policy of James in Matters of Religion

pluralists, non-resident incumbents, and ministers who merely went through the offices of the Book of Common Prayer without troubling to preach were left undisturbed, while painstaking ministers, diligent in preaching, were suspended and deprived of their livings because they could not in conscience fall in with all the ceremonies prescribed for their observance. As the hope of any further reform in the Anglican Church grew fainter, the position of the Puritan party—"the forward preachers" and "the professors," to use the old terms—grew more difficult. They had written strongly and spoken more strongly against the Book of Common Prayer. It was good in parts; but in parts it was very bad. Yet now they had perforce to accept it in every jot and tittle. They had pronounced the Church of England to be corrupt. It still smelt of Rome, and was only a degree less objectionable than its mother, described in the picturesque language of the Book of Revelation as the woman arrayed in purple and scarlet. If there was now but little prospect of purifying her from these corruptions, how could they justify themselves in remaining in communion with her? If she were indeed incorrigible, might they not rightly leave her? If she persisted in the use of superstitious ceremonies and made them imperative, ought not those who believed Jesus had laid down a simpler mode of worship, to withdraw from her? Such were the questions which agitated the minds of the Puritan clergy.

It was not without the fullest consideration that John Smith at length took the grave step of separating from the Church of England and, setting up a new Church, gathered from amongst those who were influenced by his

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

preaching. The Puritan ideal was of a united Reformed Church acting as a bond of union in the three kingdoms, bringing religion home to the lives of all the people and linking the nation in bonds of sympathy with kindred Reformed Churches in other lands. Separation, apart from the losses and dangers it involved, was distasteful to the Puritan. It was only the power of an overmastering conviction that could nerve him to sever the ties that bound him to the Church of his fathers. Smith took counsel with his friends upon the points at issue. We have his own admission that he "was distracted to and fro" before he saw the truth cleared to his "judgment and conscience." He had to pass through a period of uncertainty before he made the great resolution for separation. "During the tyme of my doubting," he says, "which was 9 months at the least I did many actions arguing doubting, but that I ever fell back from any truth I saw I praise God I can with a good conscience deny."<sup>1</sup>

Amongst those with whom Smith conferred at this time were two of his old fellow collegians who demand particular notice, Arthur Hildersham (1563—1632), of Ashby de la Zouch, and Richard Bernard, who described himself as "preacher of the Word of God at Worksop."

Hildersham was well-born. Through his mother he was connected with the Royal House of England. His parents were attached to the Roman Catholic faith. They sent their son to Cambridge, entering him at Christ's College in 1577. He was soon caught in the tide of Protestant feeling, which then ran strongly in Cambridge, and renounced his old faith, embracing

<sup>1</sup> Smith's *Paralleles and Censures*, p. 5.

## Puritans and Tithes

with the ardour of a convert the new religion. Thereupon his father withdrew him from the University to London, intending to send him to Rome. He refused to go. Happily at this juncture, through the good offices of John Ireton, a member of Christ's College, he was brought to the notice of Henry, Earl of Huntingdon, with whose family his mother was akin. Ireton happened to meet young Hildersham in London and exclaimed, "Arthur, why art thou so long from thy books, losing so much time?" "Alas, sir," he replied, "I shall go no more to Cambridge."<sup>1</sup> But when Ireton put his case before the Earl of Huntingdon, the way was soon made clear for him to resume his residence in the University, where he graduated in 1586. Disappointed of a Fellowship in his own college, he was again befriended by the Earl of Huntingdon who proved a steadfast patron. He now appointed him lecturer at Ashby, and provided for his maintenance by settling the impropriate tithes upon him for life, an act gracious in itself and pleasing to the Puritan party. The Puritans were constantly urging that the impropriate tithes, alienated from parochial uses by the greed of the monasteries and at their dissolution granted to laymen, should be again devoted to religious purposes, and especially to the maintenance of a preaching ministry.

Hildersham had scarcely begun his ministerial duties before he was suspended by Whitgift on the ground that he was not ordained and that his sermons contained "certain impertinent and very unfit speeches for the auditory." This was the prelude to a long series of persecutions, because of his unwillingness to conform to

<sup>1</sup> Brook's *Puritans*, ii., p. 337.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

all the forms and ceremonies of the Church of which he was a minister. In 1593, on the death of Thomas Wyddowes the incumbent, Hildersham was presented to the living by the Earl of Huntingdon, and so became vicar of Ashby. He held the post, in spite of suspensions and much opposition till his death. During his ministry conferences for discussion and the hearing of sermons were organised by him in conjunction with neighbouring ministers at Repton, Burton-on-Trent and Stapenhill as well as at Ashby, which did "unspeakable good to both ministers and people."<sup>1</sup> Hildersham made Ashby, for the time being, a Puritan centre and a congenial place of refuge for persecuted divines. To this district William Bradshaw (1571—1618) withdrew when suspended by Whitgift in 1602 for refusing to subscribe. Here under the hospitable roof of Alexander Redich of Stapenhill, he had leisure to commit to writing the views of the Puritan party with regard to Church order and government and the reform of religious abuses. Bradshaw's "English Puritanisme containeing the maine opinions of the rigidest sort of those that are called Puritanes," issued in 1605, was of prime importance, because it gave definition to the hopes and desires of the reforming party in the Church of England, and to some extent shaped their policy.

Hildersham actively promoted the "Millenary Petition" to the new king in 1603 for the reform of the Church, and at the Hampton Court Conference joined in presenting a number of requests to James with a similar end in view. His activity on the Puritan side

<sup>1</sup> Brook's *Puritans*, ii., p. 382.

## Conference at Coventry

made him a marked man, and on April 24, 1605, the Bishop of Lincoln suspended him from his vicarage.

It was now that John Smith resolved to confer with Hildersham upon some of the points in which they were alike interested, and which were forced upon their attention by the action of the ecclesiastical authorities. The conference was held at Coventry, we have Smith's word for that, and we are told that John Dod and John Barbon<sup>1</sup> took part in the disputation. As early as 1595 Hildersham had discussed some of the points at issue in a letter to a gentlewoman who sought his advice about separating from the corrupt ministry of the Anglican Church. This letter was published with a running commentary on it by Francis Johnson.<sup>2</sup> Both Smith and Hildersham then would be well acquainted with the arguments on either side of the case.

The result of this conference gave rise to some misconception as to Smith's position. The misunderstanding arose from the idea that Smith went into the conference as a fully convinced "Brownist" or "Separatist," holding views identical with the militant followers of Henry Barrowe and John Greenwood. This was far from the case. The steps of his progress are fairly clear. From being a Puritan clergyman, dissatisfied with the ceremonies and desiring further reform in the Anglican Church, Smith advanced to the position that episcopal authority was utterly unlawful, and the behests of bishops not worth the paper they were written on. The next stage was reached when he became convinced

<sup>1</sup> Brook's *Puritans*, ii., p. 196.

<sup>2</sup> *A Treatise of the Ministry of the Church of England*. See *ante*, p. 42.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

that it was incumbent upon the faithful to withdraw from even a true Church when it was corrupt in its ministry and its form of worship. This was the point of discussion at Coventry. Smith still acknowledged the Church of England to be a true Church and its ministry valid, though both were corrupt. On that ground it seems he was inclined to withdraw from communion with the Anglican Church, and probably had already acted on that inclination, but without as yet gathering a separate religious society. The ordinary Brownist or Barrowist regarded the Anglican Church as wholly false from bottom to top. Its foundation was false and by consequence its ministry was involved in its falsity. It was not till Smith was convinced that the Church of England was false in its constitution that he ventured to set up a separate Church on the New Testament model.

The question then was whether it was allowable to withdraw from a Church and ministry admitted to be true, but in actual condition found to be corrupt. Hildersham said, "No," and though constantly in trouble for his nonconformity, never withdrew from the Anglican Church. The upshot of the conference was that each thought he had made some impression on the other. From a verbal report Richard Bernard took it that Smith had been convinced and had his doubts resolved. And on the strength of the version of the affair that reached Andrew Willet (1562—1621) he described Hildersham as "*schismaticorum qui vulgo Brownistæ malleum.*"<sup>1</sup> Smith's own account puts the matter in a different light. It is possible that he was confirmed for the time being in his opinion that, though corrupt, the Church of England

Quoted by Rev. A. Gordon in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.



## Evolution of a Separatist

still bore the marks of a true Church, but the arguments of Hildersham against withdrawing from such a Church did not satisfy him.

Bernard's account of Smith's progress is instructive. At the opening of his "Disswasions from the Way of the Separatists," issued in 1608, he sets out seven "likelihoods and great probabilities that that way is not good." The sixth likelihood consists of examples of "the Lord's judgment giving sentence with us and against them." After a few typical "judgements" have been displayed, to deter any timid souls inclined to separate from Mother Church, the case of John Smith himself is held up as a fearful warning.

"It may seem that God would not have had Mr. Smith to have gone that way, by so often thwarting his judgment :

"(i) To publish in print on the Lord's Prayer against that way and for us much.

"(ii) In falling into it after, again under his hand to renounce the principles of that way called Brownism.

"(iii) Brought again to like it but not wholly, for he held some true Churches and some true Pastors here and did dislike the distinction of true and false Church in respect of us.

"Then went he and conferred with certain godly and learned men whereby he became so satisfied as he kneeled down and in prayer praised God that he was not misled farther : And was so resolved as he purposed to dissuade his tutor, Mr. Johnson, from the same, saying—he would go to Amsterdam for that end. This will be and is confidently avouched by divers there present. Besides these crosses in judgment the Lord did chastise him with sickness nigh unto death to consider better with himself yet of his course. And this also was by some applied unto him. And with all these a dauntableness of spirit with fear, not daring to be bold to suffer for the cause here with us, did continually accompany him. Thus it seemeth that God would more than by an ordinary course taken, have redeemed him, if either inward distractions or God's special outward means, used to recover him,

# Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

might have prevailed, but God's secret counsel shall stand. Behold the end. His own former judgment, his handwriting, his own mouth in prayer to God, godly men's testimonies, God's correcting hand—all these openly are against him.”<sup>1</sup>

The charge that Smith was not ready to suffer for the Puritan cause came with an ill grace from Bernard who, from being an active opponent of conformity, had fallen into line and was now hand and glove with the Archbishop of York. For that defection Smith had sharply rebuked him in a letter written in 1607. To Bernard's charges Smith replied in a book issued in 1609, as follows:—

“In this ‘likelyhood’ you have a fling at me in particular, Mr. Bernard, charging me with divers untruths which I will manifest.

“1. That I doubted 9 months I acknowledge, but that ever I did acknowledge ‘the Separation’ for truth and separated from the English assemblies, and *then* returned again unto them (which you say) I do utterly deny. And I appeal to the town of ‘Ganesburgh’ and those there that knew my footsteps in this matter. And therefore herein I indict you as a public slanderer.

“2. Whereas you say I became satisfied at ‘Coventree,’ after conference had with certain Ministers, and hereupon kneeled down and praised God. I answer, I did not confer with them about the Separation as you and they know well enough in your consciences, but about withdrawing from true Churches, Ministers and Worship corrupted. Wherein I received no satisfaction but rather thought I had given instruction to them. And for kneeling down to praise God I confess I did, being requested to perform the duty at night after the conference by the ministers. But that I praised God for resolution of my doubts I deny to death, and you therein are also a slanderer.

“I praised God for the quiet and peaceable conference and such like matters and desired pardon of the L[ord] for ignorances and errors and weakness of judgment and any disordered

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<sup>1</sup> *Christian Advts. and Separatists Schism*, 1608, pp. 37, 38.

## Charges Repeated

carriage. If the ministers that heard my prayers and praises of God did misconstrue my meaning let them look unto it.”<sup>1</sup>

Even after the publication of this explanation Bernard persisted in his misrepresentation of the course of Smith’s doctrinal development. He was concerned to pile up the number of his opponent’s changes of opinion.

The cumulative effect of the long list he gives is certainly great, but is weakened by his inability or unwillingness to recognise that Smith might quite consistently declare his aversion to Brownism as a whole and as a system, even when attracted to certain parts of its teaching.

Writing in 1610, Bernard repeated his charges in the following form :—

He<sup>2</sup> disclaimed Episcopal authority utterly and fell *in love with* the doctrine of the Separation, but warily and secretly at the first : for being brought to trouble and called into question about it he *renounced Brownism* under handwriting, a copy whereof was brought unto me by one now of their company. He after *fell to it again* and went unto divers Ministers godly and learned, in conferring with whom he came *resolved* of the truth *against the way of the Separation*. Of his prayer, of his solemn thanksgiving, of his purpose to go to Amsterdam to reclaim his tutor Mr. Johnson I have spoken in my book. The truth whereof will be confirmed by the oaths of Mr. Hi[ldersham] Mr. N[icholls ?] and Mr. Ho[lldand]<sup>3</sup> of whom I have heard these things with their protestation of the truth whatsoever he affirmeth in his own private cause to the contrary.”

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<sup>1</sup> Smith’s *Paralleles*, pp. 128—9.

<sup>2</sup> *Plaine Evidences*, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> It is always risky work supplying names which the writer has only indicated by initials. “Hildersham” is pretty safe. “Ho.” I judge to be Philemon Holland, 1552—1637, who settled at Coventry soon after 1595 and became usher of Coventry free school in 1608 ; with less confidence I suggest Josias Nicholls for the third. See Brook’s *Puritans*, ii., p. 136.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

The point at issue was of some practical importance to Smith, for, according to the principles of the Separatists, any one who had once joined them and then returned to the Church of England was to be regarded as an "apostate." If such a one sought re-entry into the Separatist fellowship he might be admitted again as a simple member, but was for ever debarred from holding any office in the Church. If Bernard had established his point Smith's pastoral authority would have been gone, but it is clear that he had but little to go upon and only threw back the date of Smith's actual severance from the Church of England in order to make a case against his antagonist. He tried to make it appear that Smith had separated and then returned to the fold and then again had separated from the Church of his Fathers.

Richard Bernard (c. 1567—1641) was a Nottinghamshire man. He was taken notice of in youth by Frances, the wife of Sir George Saint Paule, of Snarford, Lincolnshire. She was the younger sister of that Sir William Wray to whom John Smith dedicated his first book. Like her brother and her elder sister, Isabel, she gave generous help to poor scholars and favoured the ministrations of the Puritan clergy. Bernard dedicates one of his books to "Sir George Saintpoll, Knt., and Ladie Saintpoll," and calls them "both his singular and ever good benefactors." They assisted him to Cambridge. "By your worke of mercie," he says, "in the Vniversitie was I brought up."<sup>1</sup> He entered Christ's College. Here, if not before, he would become acquainted with John Smith. He proceeded B.A.

<sup>1</sup> "Epistle Dedicatorie" in Bernard's *Christian Advertisements*.

## Richard Bernard

early in 1595 and took his Master's degree in 1598. In that year he was presented to the living of Epworth, from whence he dated his first literary venture—a translation of Terence, together with the Latin text. He was a man of parts, master of a good English style, an earnest “Reformist” or Puritan, and not without ambition. Above all, he was a close observer of men and manners. In the year 1601 he was presented to the living of Worksop, in succession to John Goodriche, by Richard Whalley, a leading man in the affairs of the county. He was instituted on June 19, and would find abundant work in his large parish.

The priory church of St. Mary and St. Cuthbert at Worksop is a magnificent building, but the living was not a rich one, for the rectorial tithe, which had been appropriated by the monks, passed into the hands of the Crown on the dissolution of the priory, and was regranted to the see of Lincoln by Edward VI., and thus went to the bishop instead of the parish incumbent.

Here Bernard laboured for twelve years. During this time there were born to him four sons and a daughter. In 1613 he was presented under singular circumstances to the living of Batcombe, in Somersetshire, and accordingly ceded the living of Worksop into the hands of Richard Whalley, the patron, who appointed Oliver Bray<sup>1</sup> to the post. It was Dr. Bisse, rector of Batcombe who, in loving regard for the welfare of his parishioners, singled out Bernard as his successor. He bought the right of next presentation, and besought Bernard to take up his work there. Scarcely had the arrangements

<sup>1</sup> “Olyver Bray,” instituted to the living of Worksop, February 16, 1613—4.



## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

been made before Dr. Bisse died, happy in the thought of leaving one in his place who would profit and edify his "people's souls." For the right of this single presentation he had paid £200, which he called his "packing penny" between himself and God. From his Somersetshire rectory Bernard sent out a stream of books which enjoyed a wide popularity, and there he laboured faithfully till his death, with the help in his latter years of assistants, most notable of whom was Richard Alleine who succeeded him.

It is with his Worksop ministry that we are concerned, for here he came into touch and then into controversy with those who led the movement for separation from the Anglican Church. There was an influential Puritan element in his parish. John Lascelles, who was burnt at the same time as the intrepid Anne Askew, belonged to a family of that name seated at Gateford in this parish, and Anabaptist influences were not here unknown. There would be no precise insistence upon conformity in the earlier years of Bernard's ministry for Matthew Hutton (1529—1606), the Archbishop of York, was not inclined to disturb any godly Puritan who was doing good work. In fact, one of the last acts of his life was to write a letter to Robert Cecil, advising a more lenient treatment of the Puritan clergy. It was not at all congenial to him to have to take action against them. He did not think they differed fundamentally from those who were more exactly loyal to the letter of the rubrics and canons of the Anglican Church. It was folly to harass them when the Northern Province was overrun with plotting Catholics.

But with the accession of Tobie Matthew to the see



## Subscription Resisted

of York less latitude was allowed, subscription was enforced, and the clergy were pressed to observe the prescribed ceremonies to the letter.

It was at this juncture that Smith came into the district, eager for reform and full of scorn for the prelates. His old friend Bernard was like tinder ready for the spark, and was soon set ablaze. He spoke and preached in such a vein as to lead his friends to believe that he would resist the demand for subscription and the imposition of the ceremonies to the uttermost. John Smith felt confident that Bernard would support him even in a movement for separation. He was bitterly disappointed when Bernard drew back. He wrote to rebuke him sharply for falling away after having had a vision of "the truth" and acknowledging it in the presence of witnesses.

But it was not without due thought that Bernard retreated. He, like Smith, conferred with Hildersham<sup>1</sup> upon the questions at issue. He had gone so far as to gather a hundred persons into a special covenant, and those not all from his own parish. They covenanted together "not to hear the dumb ministers, to watch over one another, to admonish one another, etc.," and then they received the Lord's Supper. It was the next step to separation, but that final step he would not take. "I confesse," he says, "I was much moved with faire shewes of Scripture and with great pretences of holinesse in their [*i.e.*, the Separatists'] way, but I was not removed."<sup>2</sup> And when he was suspended by the Archbishop and realised more fully all that separation from

<sup>1</sup> Smith's *Paralleles and Censures*, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Plaine Evidences*, p. 4.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

his Church involved he gave way. He made his peace with the ecclesiastical authorities, entered again upon his vicarage and began an active opposition by word and writing against those who had looked to him to be a leader in their movement. It is probable that Tobie Matthew made the way of submission as easy as possible, for him, as his withdrawal would have been a distinct loss to the Church.

In a Latin dedication to this Archbishop prefixed to the book in which he replied to Smith in 1610, he speaks of Matthew as a second Grindal, and acknowledges that he had received "more than common favour from him." This is the more remarkable since Bernard had written strongly against the hierarchy. He at one time sent John Robinson a paper of reasons in his own writing "to prove the bishops antichristian,"<sup>1</sup> and Smith charges him with having opposed the bishops in a book:—

"But Mr. Bernard," he says,<sup>2</sup> "there is yet one other thing that I must discover to the world, namely that you have written a book against the Prelates wherein you have proved by divers arguments that their authority is antichristian. This book some of your Friends have seen and read. And though you durst not print it yourself yet you would have been content a Friend should have caused it to be published under the vizard of an unknown author. Is not this so, Mr. Bernard? Then tell me with what face or conscience you can subscribe to the Prelacy—you can plead for the Prelacy? Is not this to build that which you have destroyed?"

The more he looked into the principles and consequences of the separation the less attractive did they seem to Bernard. He had not read any works of the

<sup>1</sup> Robinson's *Justification of Separation*. Works ii., p. 91.

<sup>2</sup> *Paralleles*, p. 5.

## Primary Documents

earlier Brownists before Smith separated, but then he gave further attention to the matter, and the vehemence of Barrowe's writings repelled him. He was afraid of being tarred with the Brownist brush. He was specially concerned in the matter because some of his own parishioners were won over by the arguments of Smith, and ultimately threw in their lot with him. It was to keep them from "Mr. Smyth"<sup>1</sup> that he had set up the special covenant in his parish, but that half-measure did not satisfy them, and Bernard was soon to write of Smith and his comrades, "They have taken away part of the seale of my ministerie."<sup>2</sup> He did not let them go without a protest. He sought to win back his friends and neighbours to his side. He wrote<sup>3</sup> to Thomas Helwys, of Broxtowe Hall, with whom both he and Smith were on intimate terms, and set out a list of Separatist opinions to which he was strongly opposed. This letter from Bernard was sent on by Helwys to Smith, who, after three days' meditation, wrote a strong rejoinder (about November, 1607),<sup>4</sup> rebuking Bernard for his inconstancy, replying to his objections, and setting out the main grounds for separation from the Church of England. These two letters are of capital importance, for they are the primary documents in a long and important controversy, in which John Robinson and Henry Ainsworth, teacher of the exiled Church at

<sup>1</sup> Robinson, *Works*, ii., p. 101.

<sup>2</sup> *Christian Advs.* Ep. to Reader.

<sup>3</sup> *Paralleles*, p. 119.

<sup>4</sup> This letter from Smith is embodied in his *Paralleles* published in 1609 in answer to Bernard's *Christian Advertisements and Separatists Schism* of 1608, the preface to which is dated June 18. "Mr. Bernard had in his hands this lettre of myne six or seven months before he published this his book intituled the *Separatists Schisme*." Preface to *Paralleles*.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

Amsterdam, took part, as well as the protagonists. With this letter and one or two earlier communications from John Smith in his hands, Bernard was in a favourable position for criticising the Separatist movement. Here he had an inside view of the grounds and causes of the "Separation" from the pen of its leader. It was against this letter that his book on the "Separatists' Schism" was chiefly directed.

But even before the closing months of 1607 Bernard had already in his hands, according to Smith's account, a paper of answers in parallel column to the doubts and objections with which Bernard regarded the movement. You had, said Smith "my answer written in one column to certain doubts and objections you made written in another column which I desired you to answer and whereto as yet I have received no answer from you."<sup>1</sup> All this indicates how thoroughly and earnestly the questions at issue were discussed by the Puritan clergy of the district. It was not without careful consideration that the momentous step of separation was taken.

<sup>1</sup> Smith's *Paralleles*, p. 3. The letter of November, 1607

## CHAPTER V

### A NEW "CHURCH OF GOD"—DATE OF THE SEPARATION—THE CHURCH COVENANT—THE GAINSBOROUGH AND SCROOBY CHURCHES—MIGRATION TO AMSTERDAM

THE date of the separation of this group of Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire reformists from the Church of England and the formation of what came to be known as the Church of the Pilgrim Fathers is usually given as 1602. It will be seen from the foregoing chapters that this date is fully four years too early. It appears to have been the conjecture of Nathaniel Morton, Secretary of Plymouth Colony and nephew of Governor William Bradford. The date would, perhaps, apply to the period when these people grew more and more averse from the ceremonies of the Church of England and more and more insistent upon the need of personal conversion to the religious life. It is clear, however, that Smith was still in fellowship with the Church of England in the spring of 1605, and if we add his nine months of doubting, it brings us to 1606 as the year when the memorable step of separation was taken and a wholly new Church of 'saints' formed irrespective of parochial or diocesan boundaries.

It was, as it were, the crossing of the Rubicon for Smith and his comrades. Nothing but an imperative call of conscience would have led them to take so

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

adventurous and daring a step. One would like to have an exact account of their procedure in this weighty business, but we have to reconstruct the scene for ourselves from the scanty references that have come down to us. We may locate the birth of this new religious society at Gainsborough, for not only does Smith describe himself in 1637 as "Pastor of the Church at Ganesburgh" but he appeals against the slanders of Bernard to the townsmen of Gainsborough, as those who "knew his steps" in the matter of separation. From parts as far distant as the Isle of Axholme in Lincolnshire, Retford and Worksop, Broxtowe Hall and Skegby in Nottinghamshire, and Austerfield in Yorkshire men and women of kindred spirit came in to join the friends at Gainsborough in the work of constituting anew the Church of God. The villages of Scrooby, Sutton, Mattersey, Sturton le Steeple, and North Wheatley, all within touch of Gainsborough, contributed members. They were faced with the question as to how they should proceed, but believing that they had in the Bible an explicit guide in all matters of religious faith and practice, they turned as a matter of course to its pages for help. There they read of the times of reform in religion in ancient Israel. They read how Israel, in the days of Asa, "had for a long season been without the true God, and without a teaching priest and without law, but when they in their trouble did turn unto the Lord God of Israel and sought him he was found of them and they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul . . . and he was found of them and the Lord gave them rest round about."<sup>1</sup> They read how Josiah in

<sup>1</sup> 1 Chron. xv. 3, 4, 12, 15.



## They Covenant Together

a period of religious revival “made<sup>1</sup> a covenant before the Lord to walk after the Lord and to keep his commandments,” and how all the people stood to the covenant. Their imagination was stirred by the graphic account of the restoration of Jerusalem and the return from captivity in Babylon under Nehemiah, and how all those who had separated<sup>2</sup> themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God “entered into a curse and into an oath to walk in God’s law given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the Lord.”

These passages seemed to fit their own condition exactly. Moreover, the splendid imagery of the Apocalypse laid hold upon their minds. It went without saying amongst the Protestants of those days that the Papal Church of Rome was Antichrist and the mystical Babylon of the Book of Revelation. But here was a company of sincere believers who had reached the conviction that the Church of England was only a sort of poorly revised edition of the Church of Rome, and they too heard, as it were, an insistent voice from heaven saying, “Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins and that ye receive not her plagues” (Rev. xix. 4).

They decided to reconstitute the Church by entering into a covenant declaring their aim. It would be a source of strength—a pledge between themselves and God, and a mutual bond with one another. In Bradford’s oft-quoted words:—

“So many, therefore, of these professors as saw the evil of these things in these parts and whose hearts the Lord had

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Kings xxiii. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Neh. x. 29.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

touched with heavenly zeal for his truth, they shook off this yoke of antichristian bondage and as the the Lord's free people joined themselves, by a covenant of the Lord, into a Church estate in the fellowship of the Gospel to walk in all his ways made known, or to be made known, according to their best endeavours whatsoever it should cost them."

We have a glimpse of a similar and kindred event in the writings of John Murton, of Gainsborough, who for a long time belonged to this religious society, but advanced to the position that the true Church was entered by baptism. He discussed the matter with John Robinson. "Do we not know," he says,<sup>1</sup> "the beginning of his Church? that there was first one stood up and made a covenant and then another, and these two joined together and so a third, and these became a Church say they." This method of gathering a Church startled the Puritans by its novelty. They were seeking to reform the Church from within, and believed that Churches were only to be planted by a respectable and authorised ministry. "Where you demand," says Robinson,<sup>2</sup> "how a few of us became a Church, we answer in a word, by coming out of Babylon, through the mercies of God and building ourselves into a new and holy temple unto the Lord. . . . And for the gathering of a Church, Mr. Bernard, I do tell you that in what place soever, by what means soever, whether by preaching the gospel by a true minister, by a false minister, by no minister, or by reading, conference, or any other means of publishing it, two or three faithful people do arise, separating themselves from the world

<sup>1</sup> *A Description of what God hath Predestinated concerning Man*, 1620, p. 169.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, ii., pp. 231—3.

## Terms of the Covenant

into the fellowship of the gospel and covenant of Abraham, they are a Church truly gathered though never so weak—a house and temple of God rightly founded upon the doctrine of the apostles and prophets, Christ himself being the corner stone.”

### TERMS OF THE COVENANT

The actual terms of the covenant entered into by John Smith and his companions as given by William Bradford are remarkable, and have hardly received adequate attention. I do not think the general accuracy of the version in Bradford's narrative can be seriously questioned. He was personally acquainted with the incidents he here describes. He was an eager and impressionable young man when the covenant was entered into. It was a serious and weighty undertaking, and he would not be likely to forget the terms and tenor of the pledge by which the after-course of his life was profoundly affected. We may put it into the direct form as follows:—

“We covenant with God and with one another to walk in all his ways made known or to be made known unto us according to our best endeavours whatsoever it shall cost us.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> We may compare the terms of the covenant of the London Separatist Church, which are probably due to Francis Johnson. When anyone entered this Church he made this single promise: “I will walk with you so long as you walk in the way of the Lord and as far as may be warranted by the word of God.”—*Strype Annals*, iv., p. 175. Johnson himself speaks of his Church in 1595 as “a company of faithful people . . . gathered or joined together in all holy covenant and fellowship of the gospel of Christ by voluntary public profession of faith and purpose to live and walk together in the obedience of Christ according to his word to the praise and glory of his name.”—*Treatise of the Ministry*, p. 73. The terms were not exactly fixed. Smith's covenant has a broader outlook.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

It has not been noted that there are passages in Smith's writings which point to him as the probable author of this simple covenant, and indirectly confirm its phrasing. Thus, in writing to one of the opponents of separation with whom he had enjoyed an "ancient acquaintance" in the University of Cambridge, he points out that the covenant is "absolute, no Prince nor State can either add to it or take aught from it," and then continues :—

"God giveth 'whole Christ,' all the promises, the whole covenant on his behalf to the faithful, and the faithful on the other side promise to be God's people, wholly to deny themselves and to obey God in every one of his precepts, even the least, though it cost them their lives."<sup>1</sup>

Again, in writing to the same friend about the constitution of the visible Church, he mentions "the covenant to walk in all God's ways."<sup>1</sup>

Bernard, in criticising the Separatists, incidentally confirms the main clause of their simple covenant, though substituting the word "Christ" for God. "Their position," he says, "containeth thus much, that a company gathered (as they say) into the name of Christ by a covenant made to walk in all the waies of Christ knowne unto them . . . hath in it authoritie to ordain ministers and officers, etc."<sup>2</sup> John Robinson in an emphatic passage repeats the covenant in similar terms :—

"This," he says, "we hold and affirm that a company consisting though but of two or three separated from the world . . . and gathered into the name of Christ by a covenant made to

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<sup>1</sup> "A letter written to Mr. A. S. by John Smyth," appended to his *Paralleles*.

<sup>2</sup> Bernard's *Christian Advertisements*, 1608 p. 90.

## A Forward Look

walk in all the ways of God made known unto them is a Church, and so hath the whole power of Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

This is ample testimony to the main clause of the covenant entered into by these faithful people. They pledged themselves to walk in God's ways made known unto them, but Bradford adds the significant words: “or to be made known unto them,” which give a remarkable spaciousness and capacity for adjustment to this covenant. Did those words form part of the original pledge, or are they an afterthought on the part of Bradford added in the light of the experience of later years? I think they represent the terms of the original covenant. John Smith was conscious of the freshness of the venture on which they were embarking. He had a deep sense of the inexhaustible riches of the word of God set before them in the books of the Bible. There was a strain of mysticism in his nature. He frankly sets down “quæres” in his works of this period upon matters which were still undecided in his mind. His rapid changes of opinion brought upon him the charge of “inconstancy.” He was about the last man to declare for an absolute finality, and ever professed his willingness to learn. Necessity compelled these early Separatists to present their system as clear-cut and sharply defined in defending it against opponents, but there was more of the open vision amongst them than is often supposed. With “the freer step, the fuller breath” there came to them something of “the wide horizon's grander view.” It was of great significance and importance to after-generations that the covenant of these believers was not doctrinal but practical, that it

<sup>1</sup> Robinson's *Works*, ii., p. 132.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

had an immediate bearing upon life, and a hopeful forward look for further light from God. Doubtless we can read a wider meaning into the words of that covenant to-day, but it was no small thing to frame a bond of fellowship capable of an expanding interpretation. It left the way of advance open.

We actually find John Smith himself justifying important changes in his opinions by appealing to the terms of the covenant of his Church.<sup>1</sup> It was invoked thus early in the interests of a progressive theology as against stagnation. In the dedicatory epistle to his book on *The Differences of the Separation* (1608) he says:—

“Although in this writing something there is which overthwarteth my former judgment in some treatises by me formerly published, yet I would intreat the reader not to impute that as a fault unto me. Rather it should be accounted a virtue to retract errors. Know, therefore, that latter thoughts oftentimes are better than the former, and I do profess this (that no man account it strange) that I will every day as my errors shall be discovered, confess them and renounce them. *For it is our covenant made with our God to forsake every evil way, whether in opinion or practice that shall be manifested unto us at any time.* And, therefore, let no man plead now, as some have formerly done, ‘these men are inconstant, they would have they know not what, they will never be satisfied,’ and the like. For we profess . . . that we are inconstant in error, that we would have the truth, though in many particulars we are ignorant of it.”

This seems to me decisive evidence that Bradford was right in his description of the covenant of Smith’s Church, and that its note of amplitude was original to it rather than an after-thought. How far John Smith was indebted to earlier writers for the terms of this

<sup>1</sup> Francis Johnson did exactly the same thing in his *Inquirie and Answer of Thomas White*, 1606.



## Henry Jacob Adopts this Covenant

covenant does not appear. We find Henry Barrowe describing the Church as a "a faithful<sup>1</sup> people gathered unto Christ Jesus, ordered and governed by the rule of his word in all things, so far as shall be revealed unto them." This points in the same direction as the Gainsborough and Scrooby covenant, and may have furnished a suggestion to Smith for the terms which he and his followers adopted.

It is important to notice that Henry Jacob adopted the terms of this covenant when he laid the foundation of what Neal calls "the first Independent or Congregational Church in England." This was in 1616. It was not the first Separatist Church in England, but it was regarded as a fresh start. Jacob made a leading point of the independency of each "free congregation." He imparted rather a different accent to this Church in its teaching about intercourse with Anglicans and the relation of the State to religious societies from that noticeable among the older Separatists, but he carried off their covenant. The account of the formation of this Church relates that the intending members, having observed a day of solemn fasting and prayer for a blessing upon their undertaking, towards the close of the solemnity—

"Those<sup>2</sup> who minded this present union . . . joined both hands, each with other brother, and stood in a ringwise. Their intent being declared, H. Jacob and each of the rest made some confession or profession of their faith and repentance—some were longer, some were briefer—then they covenanted together *to walk in all God's ways as he had revealed or should make known to them.*"

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<sup>1</sup> *Discovery of the False Church*, 1590, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> "Records of Jacob-Lathorp-Jessey Church," by Dr. Whitley, in *Transactions of Baptist Historical Society*, January, 1910, p. 209. Cf. Neal, ii., p. 92.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

I take it that Jacob got the terms of this general covenant from John Robinson and the members of the Leyden Church, with whom he had conferred on the subject, and by whose example he was led to take the step from Puritanism to a modified separation. It looks as if only the "men members" took part in the initial covenanting in this case, unless we assume the masculine here to include the feminine. Fourteen years later, when this Church was under the pastoral care of John Lathrop (1630), it renewed its covenant. There were some who wanted it to be keyed up to a higher pitch, and made to include an explicit "protest against ye Parish Churches," but the majority stood to the old terms. They resolved "*to walk together in all the ways of God so far as he hath made known to us, or shall make known to us, and to forsake all false ways, and to this the several members subscribed their hands.*"<sup>1</sup>

The covenants of the New England Churches were framed in much the same terms and quite in the same spirit. In this connection we may well recall the parting advice of John Robinson to those pilgrims who went out from Leyden to New England, the general drift of which was indicated by Edward Winslow some years later in his *Brief Narration*.<sup>2</sup> "He put us in mind," says Winslow, "of our Church covenant, at least that part of it whereby 'we promise and covenant with God and one with another to receive whatsoever light or truth shall be made known to us from his written Word,' but withal exhorted us to take heed what we received for truth, and well to examine and compare it and weigh it with other Scriptures of truth before we

<sup>1</sup> *Transactions of Baptist Historical Society*, January, 1910, p. 225.

<sup>2</sup> Appended to his *Hypocrisie Unmasked*, 1646, p. 99.

## Living Stones of the Temple

received it. For, saith he, it is not possible the Christian world should come so lately out of such thick anti-christian darkness, and that full perfection of knowledge should break forth at once." Those words are in keeping with the spirit of Robinson's later ministry. It is clear that Winslow regarded the terms of the Gainsborough-Leyden-Plymouth covenant as sanctioning a progressive outlook in religion, and as opposed to an absolute finality in theology.

The Church of Christ was now, in the opinion of these pious people, once more set up in their district. They themselves were the living stones of the mystical temple of God. To what a great responsibility and dignity they were called! It lifted their lives out of the commonplace and filled them with a high purpose. After the period of doubting and hesitation, it seemed to them that they had now entered a haven of heavenly peace, and they found in their Church fellowship and discipline a means of divine grace. "Oh, Mr. Bernard," exclaims John Smith,<sup>1</sup> "if you knew but the comfort and power of the Lord's ordinances of admonition and excommunication as we do (blessed be our good God) in some measure, and that growth and reformation which is in some of us thereby, you would be so wonderfully ravished with the power of God's ordinances that you would acknowledge the Church to be terrible as an army with banners, and yet amiable and lovely, comely and beautiful, in so much as Christ himself saith that the love of the Church is fair." . . . Robinson also speaks in glowing terms of the "experimental comforts" that came to them in their Church estate,<sup>2</sup> while even

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 1607, § 8, incorporated in *Paralleles*.

<sup>2</sup> "Justification of Separation, 1610." *Works* ii., 223.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

Bernard admits that some were drawn to join these despised Separatists because of the love and care they displayed for one another.

The Church, being now constituted by covenant, soon had to proceed to deal with practical matters of internal organisation. The members had to decide how and where they should meet on the Lord's Day, and whom they should choose to the office of minister. "These people became two distinct bodies, or Churches, in regard of distance of place, and did congregate severally, for they were of several towns and villages: some in Nottinghamshire, some in Lincolnshire, and some of Yorkshire, where they bordered nearest together. In the one of these Churches, besides others of note, was Mr. John Smith, a man of able gifts and a good preacher, who afterwards was chosen their pastor." The correctness of Bradford's narrative is borne out by a comparison with the principles approved by the Separatists for the choice of pastors and officers of the Church. Smith did not become their minister as a matter of course or at once. He renounced his "Orders," and was a simple member of the Church, but his gifts marked him out for the office of minister, to which he was in due time elected by his fellow members. Robinson speaks approvingly of this course as the one taken by the early Continental Reformed Churches: "The people first separating themselves from idolatry, and so joining together in the fellowship of the Gospel, were *afterwards*, when they had fit men, to call them into the office of ministry."<sup>1</sup> Bernard scornfully

<sup>1</sup> "Justification of Separation." *Works* ii., p. 232.

## The Church at Scrooby

says of Smith: "He<sup>1</sup> was made minister by Bishop Wickham; that, by and by, in Brownism, he renounced and was made Minister by Tradesmen and called himself 'The Pastor of the Church at Gainsbrough.'" But Smith set greater store by this election than on "Orders" which the bishop conferred. "I received,"<sup>2</sup> he says, "and do maintain my ministry from that particular Church whereof I am Pastor, which hath the whole power of Christ ministerial, delegated to her from Christ her husband when he contracted with her."

The second Church, which had Scrooby as a centre and ordinarily met in the manor house occupied by William Brewster, subsequently chose John Robinson as pastor. It looked to John Smith for advice and guidance. If we may take the "Lettre,"<sup>3</sup> written to certain brethren in S. by John Smyth," as addressed to those at Scrooby, he was a true prophet as to their future. "Although you are but few in number, yet considering that the kingdom of heaven is as a grain of mustard seed, small in the beginning, I do not doubt but you may in time grow up to a multitude and be, as it were, a great tree full of fruitful branches, which I unfeignedly desire, brethren, in your behalf at the Lord's hands." This hope was amply realised in the after history of the Scrooby Church, but our concern is with the parent church at Gainsborough and its leaders.

We have seen that the decision to follow the leading of conscience and set up a Church according to the New Testament pattern brought peace of mind to these

<sup>1</sup> Bernard's *Plaine Evidences*, p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> *Paralleles*, 1609, p. 102.

<sup>3</sup> Appended to *Paralleles*. This letter has been so taken, but it seems to me possible that the brethren in S. may be brethren in Suffolk.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

earnest people, but it swiftly involved them in difficulties with the world and with the ecclesiastical authorities. They were marked at once by their abstention from the services and communion at their parish churches. The machinery of the spiritual courts was set in motion against them. Smith himself narrowly escaped arrest on two occasions by the "pursuivant," or officer, of the ecclesiastical court. Gervase Neville and Joan Helwys were carried off to York and imprisoned. Fines were levied on William Brewster, Richard Jackson, and Robert Rochester. To quote Bradford once more, 'some were taken and clapped up in prisons, others had their houses beset and watched night and day and hardly escaped their hands, and the most were fain to fly and leave their houses and habitations and the means of their livelihood.' In these circumstances the thoughts of Smith would naturally turn to his old tutor, Francis Johnson, who, banished from England on account of religion, had found a harbour of refuge in Amsterdam, together with many members of the London Separatist Church. If there was no possibility of remaining peaceably in England the Gainsborough Church might also seek a resting place in Holland. As the law of the land then stood exile was the necessary corollary of separation from the Church of England. The Act<sup>1</sup> for the punishment of persons obstinately refusing to come to church, passed in 1593, had been renewed in the first year of King James. Absence from one's parish church for a month, or attendance at any unauthorised assembly or meeting under colour or pretence of any exercise of

<sup>1</sup> Neal, i., p. 426.



## Date of Migration

religion, rendered one liable to conviction and imprisonment without bail. If the convicted person did not conform within three months he was to abjure the realm and go into perpetual banishment. John Smith and his friends were well aware of this law, and it makes their act of separation all the more heroic. They could not hope to escape attention, and within a few months they had to prepare to leave the land of their birth.

### DATE OF MIGRATION TO HOLLAND

I am inclined to place the migration of the Gainsborough Church towards the close of the year 1607 or in the early weeks of 1608. Very likely Smith and his company took a favourable opportunity of shipping direct from Gainsborough by way of the Trent to the Humber and so out to the open sea and across to their desired haven. Apparently they did not apply for leave or licence to emigrate, but took the matter into their own hands. Their sudden withdrawal put the port authorities on the alert and would seem to have made it difficult for the members of the Scrooby Church to get away when they, too, a few months later, resolved "by a joint consent . . . to go into the Low Countries." John Cotton, afterwards preacher both at Boston, Lincolnshire, and Boston, New England, tells us that Smith had promised Clifton and Robinson not to go over to Johnson "without their consents, and they utterly dissuaded him therefrom as fearing his instability. And yet contrary to his promise he went over to him, which led him into manifest temptations and aberrations."<sup>1</sup> There is nothing to support this accusation of

<sup>1</sup> Cotton's *Way of the Congregational Churches Cleared*, p. 6.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

breach of faith. Cotton's narrative bears marks of dependence upon hearsay in this particular, and he confuses Smith's expressed intention, before he was an absolute Separatist, of going to recall Johnson at Amsterdam from his extreme position, with his actual flight to that city after he had become a thoroughgoing Separatist. "He thought," says Cotton, "he could have gained his tutor Johnson from the errors of his rigid separation." But at the time of his migration that was one of the last things Smith would want to do.

It is evident that this Gainsborough Church was fully constituted and engaged in the exercise of discipline before it left England. Discipline was the cause of much difficulty in the early Separatist Churches. Those who resented a Church sentence let their grievance be widely known. The helpful and successful instances of discipline were not chronicled by the world. Bernard heard of some singular examples:—

"Mr. Smith,"<sup>1</sup> he says, "denies their rash excommunicating any, and yet a tailor among them was excommunicated for taking seven shillings for making a Doublet and Hose and standing in the lawful taking of it; because another tailor said he ought to have had but five shillings. Again, he and they (before they went over) excommunicated one (the Cap[tain] at Gainsborough) for hearing the word preached by our Minister. Is not this abuse in excommunication?"

The utter renunciation by these Separatists of all religious fellowship with members of the Church of England roused much hostility against them. Robinson did not at first go so far in this direction as Smith. He continued to join with Anglican friends in private acts

<sup>1</sup> *Plaine Evidences*, 1610, p. 117.

## Date of Migration

of worship, even after his separation, for so long as he remained in England. There were some in Smith's company who made this a ground of objection against Robinson when he was nominated for the pastoral office in the Scrooby Church.

## CHAPTER VI

### JOHN SMITH IN AMSTERDAM—PRINCIPLES AND INFERENCES CONCERNING THE VISIBLE CHURCH

ARRIVED in Amsterdam, Smith would have the opportunity of conference with his old friend Francis Johnson, and with Henry Ainsworth, "the teacher," and other leading members of the exiled English Church. Smith calls this "the Ancient Church." While he and his society entered into friendly intercourse with Johnson's Church, they maintained their distinct organisation and were never absorbed by the older society. The same may be said of the Scrooby Church under the pastoral care of John Robinson. There were already differences of accent between these several groups. The craftsmen of London, who formed a large proportion of Johnson's society, were of a different stamp from the inland men from the North Midlands, who had been mainly concerned with husbandry. Intimate personal knowledge of one another and the sufferings they had endured in common, not to speak of ties of kinship and affection, bound the churches from Gainsborough and Scrooby into something of the nature of religious clans. But on their first arrival there was intercommunion between them and the Church under Johnson. This did not endure for many months. Bradford recalled to mind in after years a saying uttered by Smith at this time which

## The Visible Church

shows he was well aware of the responsibilities and dangers of liberty. "Truly," said he "we being now come into a place of liberty are in great danger if we look not well to our ways ; for we are like men set upon the ice and therefore may easily slide and fall." <sup>1</sup>

I think it must have been within a few weeks of his arrival that he put to the press a little book with a view to looking well to the ways of his Church and its members. It is possible that it was drafted before he left England. It bears no imprint. Its title runs as follows:—"Principles and inferences concerning the Visible Church," with the quotation of four verses of Scripture, among them, significantly, Job xix. 19: "All my secret friends abhorred me and they whom I loved are turned against me," followed by the date, "1607."

This work is composed with studied brevity. It is almost entirely practical and positive, setting out the rules for forming, ordering and ruling a Church according to the principles indicated in the New Testament, and the inferences legitimately to be drawn from the records there given of the action of the Apostles. The prefatory address gives a favourable example of the incisive style which Smith had at command.

### "THE AUTHOR TO THE READER

"Lo here, gentle Reader, a short description of the new Testament which was once established by the blood of Christ after that the old testament by the blood of that his cross was disannulled. Remember that there be always a difference put betwixt the covenant of grace and the manner of dispensing it, which is twofold :--the form of administering the covenant before the death

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<sup>1</sup> Young's *Chronicles of the Pilgrims*, p. 450.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

of Christ which is called the old testament and the form of administering the covenant since the death of Christ which is called the new Testament or the kingdom of heaven. In this little treatise the ordinances of Christ for the dispensing of the covenant since his death are described. Read, consider, compare the truth here expressed with the frame, ministry and government of the assemblies of the land, and accordingly give sentence. Judge righteous judgment and let practice answerable to the truth follow thereupon. Fear not the face of man, love not the world, be not deceived with the shape of Angels of light. Cast away all prejudice against the truth. Remember that Antichristianism is a mystery of iniquity and that it began to work early during the Apostles' life and so grew by little and little to this strength and exaltation from which it shall decline by degrees even till the man of sin be destroyed whom the L[ord] shall consume with the brightness of his coming ; for God which condemneth the whore of Babylon is a strong Lord. Farewell."

In this work "the visible church" is defined as "a visible communion of saints" all of whom "are to be accounted faithful and elect . . . till they by obstinacy in sin and apostacy declare the contrary."<sup>1</sup> "A visible communion of saints is of two, three or more saints joined together by covenant with God and themselves, freely to use all the holy things of God according to the Word for their mutual edification and God's glory."<sup>2</sup> This is "the only religious society that God hath ordained for men on earth" all others such as "abbeys, monasteries, nunneries, cathedrals, collegiates, parishes," are unlawful.<sup>3</sup> "The true visible church hath power to receive :—(1) Members into communion ; (2) Officers into office."

Already Smith has given up the notion that the

<sup>1</sup> P. 7.

<sup>2</sup> P. 8.

<sup>3</sup> P. 9.



## Prophecy in the Church

entrance to the Church is by baptism in infancy. "The way or door whereby both members and officers enter in is 'Christ,' that is, the way taught by Christ in his word. The way of receiving in of members is faith testified by obedience. Faith is the knowledge of the doctrine of salvation by Christ. Obedience is a godly, righteous and sober life. Members thus received into communion are of two sorts :—(1) Prophets; (2) Private persons."

(1) The prophets "must first be appointed to this exercise by the church"; they are to speak "two or three and let the rest judge . . . . All that have gifts may be admitted to prophecy."

(2) "Private persons are men and women; private men present at the exercise of prophecy may modestly propound their doubts which are to be resolved by the prophets."

"To this exercise of prophecy may be admitted unbelievers or they that are without."

"The way of receiving officers into office is :—

"(1) Election;

"(2) Approbation;

"(3) Ordination;

which must be performed with fasting and prayer. The person to be admitted into office must first be a member of that visible church whence he hath his calling."<sup>1</sup>

"Election is by most voices of the members of the church in *full* communion. *Quære*, whether women, servants and children admitted to full communion yet under age may not give voice in elections, excommunications and other public affairs of the church?"

"Approbation must be after election."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> P. 14.

<sup>2</sup> P. 15.

# Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

We may safely picture the manner of Smith's own ordination from the particulars here given. It had to be by imposition of hands. It belonged "to the whole church . . . yet for order' sake the fittest members lay on hands and perform all other the particulars of ordination for and in the name of the whole church."<sup>1</sup>

## OFFICERS OF THE CHURCH

"The officers of the true visible Church are all absolutely described in the word of God. These officers are of two sorts :—(1) Bishops ; (2) Deacons.

(1) "The Bishops are also called Elders or Presbyters.

"The Bishops or Elders jointly together are called the Eldership or Presbytery.

"The Eldership consisteth of 3 sorts of persons or officers, viz.: the (a) Pastor ; (b) Teacher ; (c) Governors.

"All the Elders or Bishops must be apt to teach.

"The Pastor is a bishop excelling in the word of wisdom or exhortation . . . he is called the Angel<sup>2</sup> of the church.

"The Teacher is a bishop excelling in the word of knowledge or doctrine.

"The Governor is a bishop excelling in the quality of wise government.

"The Pastor and Teacher have also power to administer the Sacraments."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> P. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Compare the use of this name for the highest officer in the General Baptist Churches—Angel or Messenger ; also the regular use among the old General Baptists down to the present day of the term "Elder" to designate their pastors.

<sup>3</sup> P. 18.

# Church Officers and their Duties

These three sorts of officers, says Smith, are “conversant about the soul and spiritual part” of man. He then deals with the treasury and its officers:—

(2) “The Deacons are officers occupied about the works of mercy respecting the body or outward man. The Deacons are (1) Men; (2) or Women deacons or widows.

(1) “Men deacons collect and distribute with simplicity the church’s treasury, according to the church’s necessities and the saints’ occasions.

“The church’s treasury is silver, gold or moneyworth freely given by the members of the visible church for the common good.

“The church’s treasury is holy.

“None of those that are without may cast of their goods into the treasury lest the treasury be polluted.”<sup>1</sup>

(2) “Women deacons or widows are of 60 years of age qualified according to the Apostles’ rule, 1 Tim. v. 9, relieving the bodily infirmities of the saints with cheerfulness.”<sup>2</sup>

“Hitherto of the church’s power of receiving in; now followeth the church’s power of preserving and keeping within.

“The Pastor’s chief endeavour must be to make the church zealous holy and obedient.

“The Teacher’s chief care must be to preserve the church from ignorance and error.

“The chief office of the Governors consisteth in preserving peace and order in the Church.

“The Deacons’ chief care must be that none of the

<sup>1</sup> The texts referred to here are 2 Cor. viii., 4; Jos. vi, 17—19.

<sup>2</sup> P. 20.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

saints want bodily necessities and that due provision be made for holy things and persons . . . and that with simplicity.

"The Widows' chief office is to visit and relieve the widows, fatherless, sick, lame, blind, impotent, women with child, and diseased members of the church.

"The care of the Eldership must be to order, direct, and moderate the public actions of the church.

"The prophets' chief care must be to resolve doubts, differences and dark places and to give true expositions, translation and reconciliations of scripture.

"The office of the pastor and teacher in the exercise of prophecies is to moderate and determine all matters out of the word.

"The care of the whole church jointly must be to keep her power given her by Christ, and not to suffer any open known sin or any tyranny or usurpation over them." <sup>1</sup>

So much then for receiving and retaining members. What about casting them out? Has the Church power to remove its officers? Yes, for two grounds, "apostasy or disability . . . apostasy is when officers shall fall to open idolatry, atheism, heresy or other sins equipollent of the first or second table. The officer upon repentance . . . may be retained as a member of the church but not as an officer." <sup>2</sup>

"*Quære*, whether an officer may refuse an office imposed upon him by a lawful calling?

"*Quære*, whether the Church may suffer her officers to be translated from herself to other Churches upon any

<sup>1</sup> P. 21.

<sup>2</sup> P. 24.

## Church Officers and their Duties

ground, yea though it be granted that she have members as fit for offices as her officers are in present; yea, though the life of the officer be endangered? <sup>1</sup>

“The cause of casting members out of communion is only one, viz., sin obstinately stood in without repentance and confession after due conviction.” With this wise caution, however: “If the matter be not evident but doubtful and controversial, communion still must be preserved peaceably, notwithstanding diversity of judgment, till the truth be discovered.” This would allow of a healthy diversity of opinion on many subjects. There were things yet to be made known unto them.

“The party excommunicated is not to be counted as an enemy, but to be admonished as a brother.” <sup>2</sup>

“Every visible Church is of equal power with all other visible Churches.” <sup>3</sup>

This is an early assertion of the “independent” theory of Church order. There is a proposition at the close which has a bearing on the question of the connection between Church and State.

“The erecting of visible Churches appertaineth to princes and private persons.

“Princes must erect them in their dominions and command all their subjects to enter into them, being first prepared and fitted thereto.”

The true principle of religious liberty had not yet dawned upon Smith’s mind.

All these propositions are backed up with ample references to passages of Scripture, and the work gives us a clear picture of the manner in which John Smith’s Church was gathered, ordered, and governed. The book closes with the following note:—

<sup>1</sup> P. 25.

<sup>2</sup> P. 28.

<sup>3</sup> P. 29.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

“The author entreateth the gentle reader not to cavil or wrangle at the contents of this present Treatise, nor to traduce or caluminate his person in secret, but by writing to discover the errors thereof, which he desireth may be manifested to him, remembering that therein he shall perform a charitable work. For he that converteth a sinner from going astray out of his way shall save a soul from death and shall hide a multitude of sins. —James v. 20.”

The over-emphasis upon prophesying, propounding and resolving doubts, teaching and exhorting, as distinct from acts of pure devotion and worship, points to a weakness in the Church order here described, which was soon to result in revealing grave differences of opinion. Nevertheless, this little work is of importance as showing the high place which Smith assigned to the individual Church and for its assertion of the principle of independence. It presented in orderly form the method of constituting and regulating Churches which seemed to an attentive reader of the New Testament to have been followed by the Apostles. It dealt with a subject of great urgency in the religious circles of that day, which was pressing upon the minds of many devout English folk. It was not without influence in shaping the form and order of those English Churches which were subsequently organized apart from the Protestant Reformed Church of England as by law established, both here and in America.



## CHAPTER VII

THOMAS HELWYS — HIS PARENTAGE AND FAMILY  
HISTORY—NOTICES OF THE EXODUS TO HOL-  
LAND BY ENOCH CLAPHAM AND JOSEPH HALL

WE must now turn for a little while from the story of John Smith to consider the life of one who was closely associated with him in his efforts to set up a purer Church and in the project of transferring his Church as a body from England to Holland. After a year or two there was some searching of heart amongst a few of these refugees as to whether they had done rightly in fleeing from persecution, and they passed some frank criticism upon the "guides" who had drawn them over. To this John Robinson rejoined: "The truth is, it was Mr. Helwisse who above all, either guides or others, furthered this passage into strange countries; and if any brought oars, he brought sails, as I could show in many particulars, and as all that were acquainted with the manner of our coming over can witness with me."<sup>1</sup>

Robinson here refers to Thomas Helwys, of Broxtowe Hall in Nottinghamshire, to whom more than to any other was immediately due the planting of the first Baptist Church in England. Robinson spells the name indifferently "Helwis" or "Helwisse" in his frequent

<sup>1</sup> Of Religious Communion, *Works*, iii., p. 159.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

references to him, but the man himself and John Smith, who knew him more intimately, give the form "Helwys." The family had long been seated in the Bassetlaw wapentake or hundred of Nottinghamshire. The first reference to the name I have noted occurs in the year 1243, when on the day of the Annunciation of the Blessed Mary, Richard, son of Helewysa witnessed a charter granting lands from Hugh de Dukemanton to the Abbot William and his convent of Welbeck.<sup>1</sup> A member of this family, John Helwys, was instituted to the vicarage of East Retford on August 15, 1497, on the presentation of the Archbishop of York, and, in 1506, also obtained the rectories of Hayton and Ordsall. A marble slab in the floor of East Retford Church recorded his death:—

"Hic jacet Johannes Helwis. Vicarius de East Retford, Rector de Hayton et Ordsall qui obiit, 28 Decembris Anno 1511 Cujus animæ proprietur Deus. Amen."<sup>2</sup>

The family comes into clear view with Robert Elwes of Askham, a man of parts, who, with his wife Isabel, laid the foundations of the future fortune of this house. He made his will on March 11, 1525, and we gather from it that he was a man of sincere and homely piety.

"I give my soull to almyghtie god and to his modre sainte mary and to all the saints in hevyn . . . ii-lb. wax to be burned about me the daie of my burial . . . to the hie altar for tithes forgotten half a quarter of lardye, . . . for a trentall of masses to be don for my soull after my decease xs."

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<sup>1</sup> *Walley Charters* i. 53. British Museum, quoted in White's *Dukery Records*. 1904, p. 260.

<sup>2</sup> *Piercy's History of Retford*, 1822, p. 111.

## The Helwys Family

He makes a small bequest of ten shillings "towards the beldyng of Askham spital," a charity which still exists. It received a benefaction more than a hundred years later from a member of the Helwys family and now shelters three aged widows of Askham parish.

Robert was succeeded by his son William Ellwes, who married, first, Rosamund<sup>1</sup> Livesey, of a Lancashire family, and, secondly, in the last year of his life, Margaret Gabitus, who survived him barely eighteen months. He had a large family and seems to have prospered in the world. His will,<sup>2</sup> in which he describes himself as a "farmer," is dated October 5, 1557. He gives to the "church of St. Nycholas of Askam," in which he was to be buried vs., and "to 'Sir' Richard Bennett the curate of Askam aforesaid iij s. iiij d. to pray for me." He mentions "my leases and all my farmes at Everton and Scrobye." To his son Edmund, who had by this time left the old home, he made a bequest in these terms:—

"Also my sonne Edmonde who had of me a hundred mark. I wyll that he shall have xxxiij li. xij s. iiij d. more, which maketh up an hundredth pounds."

This was the round sum that he left to each of his sons Geoffrey and Thomas. Twelve days after making his will he was buried at Askham.

Edmund Helwys is said to have entered Grays Inn.<sup>3</sup> This appears to be a mistake, but he may have entered

<sup>1</sup> Buried at Askham, December 30, 1556.

<sup>2</sup> In the York Probate Registry.

<sup>3</sup> It is so stated in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, but I have looked up the list of admissions to Grays Inn given in the Harleian MS., 1912, and find it was Edward Elmes, not Edmund Elwes, who entered that court in 1550.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

one of the other Inns of Court. The opposition of the "common" lawyers to the clergy who upheld the "civil" law, threw the legal profession very largely upon the Protestant side and strengthened the cause of reform. The bent of Edmund Helwys for religious topics is shown in a curious book published in 1589, entitled "A Marvell Deciphered" an exposition of the 12th chapter of Revelation with the text.<sup>1</sup> This work has been assigned to the father of Thomas Helwys, though it bears the name "*Edward Hellwis*" at the end. The confusion between the names Edmund and Edward was frequent, and in spite of this discrepancy the ascription of authorship is probably correct. It was a topical patriotic tract called forth by Protestant feeling engendered by the Spanish attack on England. The writer makes a veiled allusion to Queen Elizabeth as foreshadowed by the woman clothed with the Sun in the 12th chapter of Revelation and to the Pope as the Dragon that made war on her. When he comments on the verse which represents the Woman as having "the Moon under her feet," he says it is "not to be doubted what woman before all others whatsoever, as a substitute under God, hath brought forth so great and divine light in time of so great darkness, either for whom the moon by her force and influence hath brought more destruction to her enemies, either unto her enterprises at sea better success."<sup>2</sup> An evident reference to the part played by tidal forces in the destruction of the Spanish Armada.

<sup>1</sup> At London, printed by Robert Robinson for John Winnington, at the Golden Tunne neere to S. Dunstones Church, in Fleete Street, 1589, pp. x., 12. 4to. British Museum Library, C. 37, c. 3.

<sup>2</sup> *A Marvell, etc.*, p. 2, margin.

## A Sermon in a Will

But the will of Edmund Helwys shows in a remarkable way the hold which the Pauline theology had taken upon him. Being acquainted with the law he drew up his own will<sup>1</sup> and prefaced it with a personal confession of faith from which we may readily infer the atmosphere of the home in which Thomas Helwys was brought up. It is well worth quoting for the light it throws upon the religious convictions of a country gentleman in Elizabeth's days:—

"I, Edmund Helwis, alias Elwis, of Broxtoe in the county of Nottingham gentleman, whole and sound in body and of good and perfect remembrance, the Lord be praised, and yet considering the uncertainties of this world which is justly termed a dirty sty, a grove of thorns, wherein is nothing but fear, shame, vexation, tears, labour, sickness, sin and death, do make this my last will and testament in manner and form following under my own handwriting the xxiiij September, in the year of Christ's incarnation, 1590. First, I bequeath my soul to Almighty God my Creator which is the soul of so wicked and sinful a creation that I might despair of any acceptance of the same at his hands were it not that the Holy Scriptures comfort me, teaching in many places that Christ Jesus, the immaculate Lamb of God, being free from sin gave himself up to suffer death upon the cross for us wretched sinners to deliver us from the wicked wor[l]d Gal. 2, and he is the fulfilling of the Law to justify all that believe Ro. 10. On this Christ do I believe and therefore shall not be condemned, but shall have life everlasting. Jo. 3. Through this belief I shall not abide in darkness Jo. 12. This belief is my justification Acts, 20, and St. Paule saith Ro. 13 that God is the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. To conclude, I do believe that Christ hath delivered us from the curse of the Law in as much as he was made accursed for us, Gal. 3. This Jesus I confess with my mouth to be the Lord and believe in my heart that God raised him from death Ro. 10. And through this belief I hope with St. Paul to be purged from

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<sup>1</sup> Registered in York Probate Registry.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

all my sins which I confess are many and most wicked, yea infinite and abominable and therefore say with St. Augustine, 'What shall I give unto God that putteth me in remembrance of my sin and yet am afraid thereof.' Wherefore the worldly goods that God hath made me steward of my will is to dispose them as, &c., &c." this testament directs.

It appears from the terms of this will that Edmund Helwys had sold his lands in the counties of Lincoln and Northampton and had taken a lease of Broxtowe Hall. He bequeaths to his daughter Anne her mother's wedding ring and the apparel that was her mother's, his best gelding and the side saddle, his "psalme boke covered with redd leather," and arranges for her comfort while unmarried to have "the use several to herself and her friends and her servants of the chamber over the dining parlour at Broxtoe Hall with all the furniture therein & also a bed room in the chamber over the buttery." Alas! this beloved daughter<sup>1</sup> in the flower of womanhood was cut down by death within a month of the making of this will and laid in the same tomb with her father.

The young man Thomas Helwys, who was left sole executor, not only had a heavy burden of business laid on his shoulders, but a heavy burden of sorrow. He was early acquainted with the tragic element in life. Edmund Helwys was buried on October 24, 1590, and his son fulfilled the request in his will: "my bodie I would have buried in the church of Bilburrowe eyther in the chancell or before the pue dore and a grave stone<sup>2</sup> laid thereupon with my firste coate of armes sett thereupon

<sup>1</sup> *Nata simul dilecta tibi vi mortis iniquae  
Rapta, sub hoc tumulo, cum genitore jacet.*

From the Latin inscription.

<sup>2</sup> An altar tomb was set up near his pew; this was broken up in 1833, but the inscription from the end or side was then fixed on the north wall of the chancel, where I have examined it.



## Broxtowe Hall

in brasse." Thomas Helwys would also see to distributing his father's bequest to "twenty poor cottagers in Basford, Bilburrowe and Bulwell," and would send on to his cousin Gervase Helwys, afterwards Lieutenant of the Tower, the angel which his uncle Edmund had left him as a token of remembrance. Apparently he had not yet finished his education, and so the affairs of the estate would be attended to by his uncles John and Geoffrey with the advice of his father's good friends Sir Thomas Stanhope and Edward Stanhope of Nottingham, who were appointed supervisors of the will. Whatever may have been the case with his father, I find that Thomas Helwys or Elwes was admitted to Gray's Inn in 1593.<sup>1</sup> He returned in due course to Broxtowe. The Hall there is pleasantly situated on the brow of a hill. Its defensible position gave it importance. There the Hundred Court held its meetings, so it gave its name to a division of the county.

In the old days Broxtowe was a separate parish. Its rectory had been granted to the priory of Sempringham. But it is an early example of a country village falling to decay and losing its status as a parish. On April 26, 1458, it was dissolved and united with Bilborough on the petition of Robert Strelley. The memory of its former high estate was still preserved in Thomas Helwys' time. At the end of the first Register Book of Bilborough there is "A true terrier off the Rectorie off Broxtowe," a document dated 1595, setting out the old bounds of the rectory lands, which mentions "the land of the chappell and the chapel ground." It bears the

<sup>1</sup> Harleian MS. 1912, folio 29. He is stated to be of London, where he had relatives. Foster's *Gray's Inn Register*, p. 81.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

signature, in his firm clear hand, of "Thomas Helwys" standing at the head of a short list of other inhabitants. To-day Broxtowe Hall forms a substantial farm house, the Broxtowe wood stretches away to its rear along the shoulder of the hill. The little enclosure on the north-easterly side of the house is still known as "the chapel garden"; beyond it are evidences of a bank and ditch for defensive purposes. It was garrisoned as an outpost from Nottingham, and saw fighting in the Parliamentary war.

In the year when the bounds of the old rectory were once more defined Thomas Helwys took to himself a wife in the person of Joan Ashmore. They were married<sup>1</sup> at Bilborough on December 3, 1595, in good time to get ready for Christmas. Their house became a hospitable centre and place of call for the Puritan clergy of the district. Helwys himself was deeply interested in questions of religion, and his doors were open to those able to discuss with him the pressing problems of the day. Here Richard Bernard called on his way home from conferring with Arthur Hildersham; here John Smith, when he was sick nigh unto death, found a haven of refuge, and in the spacious old Hall upon its breezy, healthy eminence overlooking Basford was tenderly nursed back to health. In later years, when an imputation was made against him that he had made merchandise of the folk who gathered round him, Smith exclaimed, "All that Mr. Hel[wys] can say is that when I was sick in England at Bashforth [*i.e.*, Basford] I was troublesome and chargeable to him: wherin I confesse his kindnes, but I would have given him satisfaction and he refused it and

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Helwys and Joanna Ashmore *nupti fuerunt 3 die Decembris Anno Dō 1595.*

## Interest in Religion

in my sicknes ther was as much brought in as I spent.”<sup>1</sup> Smith and Helwys were close and intimate friends, and they went heartily together in the way of Separation. Joy came to the home at Broxtowe and to the hearts of Joan and Thomas Helwys with the birth of a son, who was baptized in the ordinary way on September 5, 1595. They gave him the name of John. There is the record of the baptism of another son in 1603, whom they named Thomas.<sup>2</sup> Daughters also came to brighten the cheerful hearth. It would be a good home to visit, and we must bear in mind that there were little children when we come to consider the sacrifices that Helwys and his courageous wife had to make on account of their religious convictions.

There is not much to be said about the early married life of Helwys. He probably spent his days like an ordinary steady-going country gentleman of the time. His serious interest in religious matters would keep him in touch with neighbouring clergy, and his connection by marriage and kinship with families of standing both in London and the country would help to keep public affairs prominently before his mind. He belonged to a circle which was by no means tamely submissive to the demands of the government. When levies were ordered from the county of Notts in 1594 for service in Ireland, two of his connections, “Nicholas Hamerton and John Elvas” were reported as “backward and undutiful” in service, and were ordered to appear before the Privy Council.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Retraction of John Smith, Sig. Cij., York Minster Library.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas, *filius* Thome Helwys, *baptizatus fuit 13 die Octobris Anno Dñi*, 1603.

<sup>3</sup> Acts of the Privy Council, xxv., p. 6.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

As for Thomas Helwys, when it came to the point as to whether he should remain in communion with the Church of England, hoping for its further reformation by King and Parliament, or separate from it forthwith and join in setting up a purer Church, he did not hesitate to take the bolder step. His prominent position and activity in the Separatist movement marked him out for prosecution by the clerical authorities. The High Court of Ecclesiastical Commission for the province of York took active proceedings against members of the Gainsborough and Scrooby Churches in the autumn of 1607. This spurred on the preparations for departure to Holland, and Thomas Helwys appears to have got clear away without arrest. I wonder if he thought his wife would be left unmolested. If so, he was mistaken. Annoyance at his escape made the authorities less reluctant to lay hands on her. Early in 1608<sup>1</sup> she was under arrest in York Castle, and was brought thence to appear before the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. She proved to be of courageous spirit, declined to incriminate herself, and was sent back to prison in the Castle along with John Drewe and Thomas Jessop "for refusing to take an oath according to law." Her case came before the court again some months later, when her name is given as "Joan Elwaies of Basford." She probably allowed the law to take its own course with her, and in that case would be banished after her three months' imprisonment, and would thus rejoin her husband in Holland, but I can find no trace of her in Amsterdam

<sup>1</sup> Dexter's *Congregationalism*, p. 320, note, gives the date January 26, 1607—8; Barclay, *Inner Life*, p. 68, gives July 26, 1607—8—an evident mistake; Brown, *Pilgrim Fathers*, 1897, p. 97, gives July 26.

## Notices of the Flight to Holland

and she may have found refuge with her own friends or her husband's kindred in London.

It may be asked whether the migration of these companies of earnest religionists from the Gainsborough and Scrooby districts excited much remark at the time? In the locality itself the withdrawal of such a numerous body of people could not pass without attracting attention, and the difficulties which beset the passage of the group from Scrooby served to give greater publicity to their cause. Estates had to be realized, offices given up, and arrangements made for those who were left behind. For a time it would form a common topic of conversation in the neighbourhood. Upon those who were personally acquainted with the leaders of the movement and upon the Puritan party, which was specially interested in the questions of Church reform and the limits of episcopal authority, this concerted migration to the Low Countries would make a deep impression. But the Puritans, after all, were not in a majority and other matters of interest soon arose to absorb their attention. There are but few references in contemporary literature to this provincial religious movement, and the placid stream of life in the old locality soon resumed its normal flow. Bernard wrote of "this breach" in 1608 as follows<sup>1</sup> :—

"Many laugh at it, some account it a matter scarce worthy thinking upon, and so few or none lament . . . To me hath it been just cause of sorrow and therefore could I not lightly pass it by, but in love to such as yet abide with us and in desire to do my best to recover again mine own whom God once gave me I have published these things."

There we have a glimpse of the local feeling. News

<sup>1</sup> 'Epistle Dedicatorie' prefixed to *Christian Advertisements*.

# Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

of the movement filtered through to London. Enoch Clapham issued a book there in 1608<sup>1</sup> in which he represented the chief religious parties in a series of dialogues. Among them he gives the "Malcontent" and the "Flyer," representing the forward Puritan and the separating Brownist. "The<sup>2</sup> very naturell character of such spirits" he says, "is by mee set downe not without sundrie yeares experience had of them all." In the course of their dialogue the following reference to the setting up of the Gainsborough and Scrooby Churches occurs :—

*Flyer* : . . . "I have no small hope that thousands in England (that now stand on the tip-toe) will ere long fall flatly on our side. Hear you not of Teachers and people in the farthest parts of Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire &c. who are flatly separated ?"

*Malcontent* : "I heard of it th'other day by a London Preacher who sorroweth much for a Gentlewoman of place, who is said to be absolutely gone from the Church. But as I know some of them Teachers, and specially him that is said there to have baptized one of their children in a Barn, so my hope is that their Separation is not so far as yours, but one with that which I purpose."<sup>3</sup>

Joseph Hall, who had been personally acquainted with Smith and Robinson at the University, soon heard of their decision to leave the Church of England, and sent them a "loving monitory letter." He did not think at the time that they would go to the extremes of the earlier Separatists in London. "I thought," he says, "you had made a Secession, (rather than a Separation from our Church) to a place where you might have scope to

<sup>1</sup> *Errorr on the Right Hand through a Preposterous Zeale*, 1608.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Epistle to Reader.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.



## The News Reaches London

profess and opportunity to enjoy your own conceits.”<sup>1</sup> He was disappointed when he found that his old friends had so far adopted the Brownist position as to have become absolute and rigid Separatists from the Church of England and all its worship.

<sup>1</sup> *Common Apology against the Brownists*, 1610. Hall's *Works*, vol. x., p. 88, s. 46.

## CHAPTER VIII

### DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SMITH AND JOHNSON— SMITH'S VIEW OF THE SCRIPTURES

NOT many months had passed after the arrival of Smith and Helwys at Amsterdam before differences between them and "the ancient brethren of the Separation" were accentuated and brought out into high relief. A closer acquaintance with the Church of Johnson and Ainsworth did not improve Smith's opinion of its order of worship or its method of government. When Smith left the Church of England, he advanced at a stride to the democratic position that the seat of power resided in the Church members as a whole, and not in the Church officers. He found that the older Separatist Church under the leadership of Francis Johnson was inclined to give undue authority to the presbytery. They favoured a clerical aristocracy, and made much of "lay elders," who were included with "pastor" and "teacher" in "the presbytery." Moreover, he came to differ from them about the place to be assigned to the Bible during the act of worship, and about the nature of translated Scriptures. He frankly admitted his indebtedness to the writings of those who had led the earlier Separatist movement. He believed that they had "reduced the Church to the true Primitive and Apostolique constitution." They had dealt a

## Change of Opinion Justified

smashing blow at "Antichrist" by indicating how a Church should be "constituted." But in the manner of carrying on the service of the Church and ordering the ministry there was room for further reform. They were not yet entirely in accord with the New Testament model. Indeed, "Antichrist" was still exalted in "a verie high degree . . . even in the true constituted churches" of the Separatists.

That being Smith's opinion, conflict between him and the earlier Separatists was inevitable. He was well aware that any differences between them would be laid hold of at once by their common opponents and used as a weapon against themselves. The circumstances of the time made it urgent that they should present a solid front to the world. Expediency demanded that they should put points of disagreement into the background. But John Smith was not the man to study expediency when the interests of truth were concerned. Thoroughly convinced, as he was, that he had attained a clearer vision of the true nature of divine worship than Johnson's Church had reached, he felt impelled to publish it. "The truth," he says, "shall by our differences be further cleared." If the enemy scoffed at their divisions, could they not point to "most violent oppositions and deadly contentions" amongst the members of the Anglican Church, who yet were supposed by law to be uniform in belief and practice? Let them look at home. As for himself and his company, he wrote as follows upon the fresh development in their opinions:—

"We profess . . . <sup>1</sup> that we would have the truth, though in

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<sup>1</sup> Prefatory Address to Smith's *Differences of the Churches of the Separation*, 1608.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

many particulars we are ignorant of it. We will never be satisfied in endeavouring to reduce the worship and ministry of the Church to the primitive Apostolic institution from which as yet it is so far distant. Wherefore my earnest desire is that my last writing may be taken as my present judgment, and so far forth as it overthwarteth any former writing of mine, let it be accounted a voluntary retraction and unfeigned repentance of my former errors and evil ways before the whole earth. And let no man be offended at us for that we differ from the ancient brethren of the separation in the Liturgy, Presbytery and Treasury of the Church. For we hold not our faith at any man's pleasure or in respect of persons, neither do we bind ourselves to walk according to other men's lines, further than they walk in the truth. Neither let the world think that we approve them [*i.e.*, the ancient Separatists] in all their practices. Let them justify their proceedings or repent of them."

The point of difference that first came into prominence and caused a deal of excitement amongst the several groups of English refugees in Holland was concerned with the use of translations of the Scriptures in the act of spiritual worship. Henry Ainsworth summarized the matter in these terms:—

"There<sup>1</sup> was one only difference between M. Smyth and us when first he began to quarrel, though since he have increased them . . . that difference was this:—He with his followers breaking off communion with us charged us with sin for using our English Bibles in the worship of God, and he thought that the 'Teachers' should bring the originals of Hebrew and Greek, and out of them translate by voice. His principal reason against our translated scripture was this: 'No apocrypha writing but only the Canonical scriptures are to be used in the Church in the time of God's worship; every written translation is an apocrypha writing, and is not Canonical scripture. Therefore every written translation is unlawful in the Church in time of God's worship.' Why he counted every translation apocrypha and what he meant thereby appeareth by these words of his; 'Written translations (saith he)

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<sup>1</sup> *A Defence of the Holy Scriptures, etc.*, by Ainsworth, 1609, p. 3.

# Differences between Smith and Johnson

or interpretation is as well and as much an human writing as an homily or prayer."

Ainsworth tells us in the margin, that this was the third of four general arguments which Smith offered to the Church of Johnson and Ainsworth "on the second days public conference." And further says:—

"After much time spent about this controversy he manifested other differences touching the ministry and treasury and soon after published this book of Differences."

We thus learn that the questions at issue were publicly discussed. Smith was unable to bring the Ancient Church over to his point of view. The usage of sixteen years had bound its members in sentiment to their own familiar order of worship. They did not fully understand Smith's point, and were not disposed to refrain from using their Bibles in the time of worship merely for the sake of keeping communion with him and his company. Accordingly, he and his friends withdrew, gave up inter-communion with the older Church, and described themselves as "the Brethren<sup>1</sup> of the Separation of the second English Church at Amsterdam."

Richard Clifton's account of the progress of Smith's opinions bears out what has been said. He describes Smith and his friends as "taking up error after error; first calling into question whether the Scriptures being translated into other tongues were not the writings of men; then casting the reading of them out of the worship of God, affirming that 'there is no better warrant to bring translations of Scripture into the church and to read them as parts and helps of worship than to bring in expositions, paraphrasts and sermons upon the

<sup>1</sup> Title page of *Differences, etc.*

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

Scripture, seeing all these are equally human in respect of the work equally divine in respect of the matter they handle.' And for the same cause separated themselves from other churches that did read and use the same in their public meetings."<sup>1</sup>

It needed some patience and sympathy in order to understand Smith's real opinion about the place and use of Scripture in the Church. Anyone who has had to confront Bibliolaters in argument will be aware how difficult it is for them to appreciate any point of view that differs from their own, and how prone they are to misrepresent any view about the Bible which does not accord with that usually taken by themselves. There is hardly any topic which rouses strong feeling more quickly, and we can readily understand why this is so. Smith soon found that those who had a less lofty conception of spiritual worship than he were distorting his position and spreading false reports of his attitude toward the books of the Bible. Accordingly, he published a book to put the matter in its true light. It indicates his purpose in its long title:

"The Differences of the Churches of the Separation, Contayning, A description of the; Leitourgie and Ministerie of the Visible Church, annexed, as a correction and supplement to a little treatise lately published bearing title 'Principles and Inferences concerning the Visible Church.'" Published: (1) For the satisfaction of every true lover of the truth, especially the Brethren of the Separation that are doubtfull; (2) As also for the removing of an Vnjust Calummie cast vppon the Brethren of

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<sup>1</sup> Clifton's *Plea for Infants, etc.*, 1610, Epistle to Reader. The quotation from Smith is from his *Differences*, p. 10. Clifton omits the word "written." Smith wrote "no better warrant to bring translations of scripture written into the Church," etc.



## Spiritual Worship

the Separation of the second English Church at Amsterdam ;  
(3) Finally, for the clearing of the truth and the discovering of the mystery of iniquity yet further in the worship and offices of the Church."

By John Smyth . . . "Try all things keep the good thing."  
—1 Thes. v. 21. . . . 1608.

It is to the pages of this book rather than to Ainsworth or Clifton that we must turn for a right understanding of Smith's position with regard to Holy Scripture. In the first place we must note that he drew a sharp distinction between what he called "the Kingdom of the Saynts" and "the priesthood of the Saynts." By these quaint phrases he indicated two distinct kinds of activity in the Church. "The actions of the Church," he says, "in administering the *Kingdom* are actions of opposition, difference, plea and strife as in admonition, examination, excommunication, pacification, absolution, etc." Whereas the members in their *priestly* aspect are concerned with "spiritual worship." Accordingly "actions of the *priesthood* of the saints are actions of spiritual worship," and in this worship "the saints are not to oppose, contradict, examine, or censure, to propound doubtful and controversial points of doctrine, but in union spiritual to offer up one and the same spiritual sacrifice to the Lord."<sup>1</sup> He thus marks off the devotional from the governmental functions of the Church. To the former he attaches the very highest importance. Spiritual worship must be spontaneous and sincere, and flow directly from the spirit of man or the regenerate part of the soul—"the sanctified memory,"<sup>2</sup> the sanctified

<sup>1</sup> *Differences*, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. iii.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

judgment, the sanctified heart and affections, the sanctified conscience, from all these must spiritual worship proceed." Here we see John Smith feeling after a corrective to that over-emphasis upon discussion and debate which was one of the defects of the early Separatist movement. In spiritual worship, he says, care must be taken not to quench the spirit.

"Saying set forms of worship by rote is quenching the spirit and reading set forms of worship out of a book is quenching the spirit. For in the one the spirit is not manifested, but the strength of the memory; in the other the matter is not brought out of the heart but out of the book and so in neither of them the spirit is at liberty."<sup>1</sup>

In the next place we must carefully note the view which Smith arrived at with regard to the value of translations of the Scriptures. In his day the English speaking peoples had not adopted a single fixed translation of the Bible, at the recommendation of King and Convocation. There were several translations available. Smith, who was a diligent student of the Scriptures, would give some attention to Dutch and French versions of the New Testament on his arrival at Amsterdam. He began to reflect upon the real nature of translations, and soon came to see that in themselves they could not possibly be "inspired" in the sense in which that word was ordinarily used. Moreover, he saw that the earliest Christian societies of worshippers evidently had not got all the New Testament books to use in their meetings for worship, even if they had desired such helps. But it was precisely that spontaneous heart-whole spiritual worship of the early Christian communities that he was

<sup>1</sup> *Differences*, chap. iv.

## Value of Translations

now bent upon reviving. Therefore he concluded that the use of Scripture as an integral part of worship was not required. It might be used as a means of preparation for worship and as a source of suggestion for religious themes, but translations of Scripture were out of place in the act of worship itself. He pointed out that writings were only made up of letters and words, and therefore "that books or writings are in the nature of pictures or images, and therefore in the nature of ceremonies, and so by consequence, reading a book is ceremonial."<sup>1</sup> The originals in Hebrew and Greek he held to be inspired, but a translation could only be called inspired in so far as it expressed the original, and many a paraphrase and commentary expressed more of the meaning of the original than a bare translation could possibly do.

Let us see his own words on these points:—

"The Holy Scriptures, viz., the Originals, Hebrew and Greek, are given by Divine inspiration, and in their first donation were without error, most perfect, and therefore Canonical. Ordinary men write books of divers kinds, among the rest such as have the word of God or Holy Scripture for their object are called 'theological writings,' among them translations of the Holy Scriptures into the mother tongue are chiefly to be esteemed as being the most principal; yet only as the stream issuing from the fountain, or as the greatest river of the main sea. No writings of ordinary men, how holy or good soever, are given by inspiration, and therefore are subject to error, and imperfect and so apocrypha."<sup>2</sup>

Then, as regards the value of translations, Smith says:

"A translation, so far forth as it doth truly and fully express any thing of the originals may be said [to be] inspired of God, and

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<sup>1</sup> *Differences*, chap. vi.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

# Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

no further. Hence it followeth that a translation, be it never so good, is mixed with men's devices, imperfect not equipollent [equivalent] to the original in a thousand particulars."<sup>1</sup>

While he admits the Scriptures to be "the fountain of all truth" and "the ground and foundation" of faith, nevertheless they "are not retained as helps before the eye in time of spiritual worship." He gives a chapter of reasons for this conclusion, some of which are very quaint, and even in that day must have been regarded as more ingenious than convincing. Here are one or two examples:—

"Because Christ used the book to fulfill all righteousness (Mt. iii. 15), and having by the use of the book fulfilled the law of reading, he shut the book in the Synagogue to signify that that ceremony of book-worship, or the ministry of the letter, was now expired and finished. Luke iv. 20; John xix. 30.

"Because none of the books of the New Testament were written many years after the day of Pentecost, at the least seven years, and the churches all that time could not use the books of the New Testament which they had not.

"Because it is against the nature of spiritual worship for when we read we receive matter from the book into the heart, when we pray, prophecy or sing we utter matter out of the heart unto the ear of the Church. Ezek. i. 8—19; iii., 1—4. Rev. x. 8—11.

"Because upon the day of Pentecost fiery cloven tongues did appear, not fiery books and always there must be a proportion betwixt the type and the thing typed. Upon the day of Pentecost the fiery law was given in books. Deut. xxxiii. 2; Ex. xxiv. 4—12, upon the day of Pentecost the fiery gospel was given in tongues. The book, therefore, was proper for them, the tongue for us. . . . Therefore as in prayer the book is laid aside, and *that* by the confession of the ancient brethren of the separation, so must it be also in prophesying and singing of Psalms, as we are persuaded."

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<sup>1</sup> *Differences*, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. x.

## Unsettled Questions

It is characteristic of John Smith that he does not pretend to have reached the whole truth on every point relating to the use of Scripture in the Church, and he leaves open a loophole for accommodation with the "ancient brethren" in certain queries.

"Query, whether the Prophets [*i.e.*, preachers] of the Church may not in time of spiritual worship take the originals and interpret out of them a text and then shut the book and prophesy from that ground of Holy Scripture so interpreted."<sup>1</sup>

"Query, whether between the parts of spiritual worship, that is, between prayer, prophesying, and singing Psalms, a man may not interpose the reading of a Scripture or chapter, not intending it as worship, but as a further preparation to worship."<sup>2</sup>

"It is not denied," he says, "but that reading now is to be used in the Church: only we say it is not part of spiritual worship or a lawful means in time of spiritual worship . . . again, that reading is a lawful, yea, necessary, means or help to further us to spiritual worship is not denied." In short, the function of reading Scripture in the assembled congregation was to be regarded as an act of preparation for worship, setting the hearts of the worshippers in tune for the highest acts of devotion. It is significant that in at least one of the Unitarian General Baptist Churches of Kent down to well within living memory the reading of Scripture was used in precisely this way while the congregation was assembling and settling down for actual worship.

Smith himself summed up the matter as follows:—

"We have [*i.e.*, hold] the translations of Holy Scripture in this account, viz., the translation agreeable to the originals—

"(1) Is a secondary Scripture, yet much inferior to the originals.

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<sup>1</sup> *Differences*, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

"(2) It may be read in the Church and sung in times.

"(3) It may be expounded in the Church.

"(4) It may be used as a means to prepare us to spiritual worship.

"(5) That the matter of the translation agreeable to the originals is inspired, but not the writing or character.

"(6) That it may be made the ground of our faith.

"(7) That it may be made an instrument to try doctrine by.

"This we hold affirmatively. Negatively we hold thus:—

"(1) That reading the English translation is no part of the spiritual worship of the New Testament properly so called viz., of prayer, prophecy, singing of psalms.

"(2) That reading the English translation is no lawful means or help in time of spiritual worship.

"(3) That the worship of the New Testament must not begin in the book or letter outwardly, but must proceed originally from the heart and Spirit.

"All other public and private uses of translations we allow."<sup>1</sup>

Outsiders were not likely to appreciate the fine distinctions as to the use of Scripture which Smith now made. Richard Bernard charges him with "casting off reading the Scriptures in the assemblies," but John Robinson, knowing the man most intimately, was aware of his point of view, and replied that in making this charge Bernard "wrongeth Mr. Smyth, who doth not deny the reading of the Scriptures in the assembly, but that the reading of them is properly a part of God's worship."<sup>2</sup> Before we pass on to consider Smith's opinion about the place and power of the ministry, it will be worth while to notice two passages in this earlier portion of his book, which throw light upon the general

<sup>1</sup> *Differences*, pp. 17—18.

<sup>2</sup> Robinson, *Works*, ii., 455.



## Expository Preaching not Worship

method of pulpit ministration amongst the Separatists and the demeanour of the people during the preaching. The sermons were long and branched off into many heads and sub-heads, with a wealth of references to kindred passages of Scripture. The people brought their pocket Bibles and turned up the several quotations as the preacher gave them out in order to verify them and impress them more firmly upon their minds.

This was all very well in its way, but it was something far different from divine worship as John Smith pictured it. In justification of their usual method of preaching, the ancient brethren quoted the example of Christ's preaching in the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke iv. 16). But, said Smith, you cannot justify the "manner of preaching now used" from that example; "that a man shall take his text and then divide it into parts, analyzing it rhetorically and logically, collecting doctrines and uses from every member or argument or word of his text, all this while he having his book before his eyes to help him at all assays, a thing whereof I am assured the Holy Scriptures yieldeth no warrant, that it may be accounted a part of spiritual worship. For although the Scriptures may be so handled, and that for very profitable use, yet that is rather a Scholastical Lecture than an Ecclesiastical worship. It is rather an inquisition and searching of the Holy Spirit's intent and purpose than prophesying."<sup>1</sup> The distinction between the lecture and the sermon needed to be pointed out, and there will be many in modern times who will sympathize with Smith's plea that each should be kept to its proper place. With regard to the question

<sup>1</sup> *Differences*, p. 16.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

as to whether hearers may "have their translations or the originals to read or search in time of prophesy," Smith said, "The answer is negative." He gives reasons for his view, and very sensibly remarks, "Searching quotations hindereth attention, for the mind and affections are distracted from hearing by seeking the places; seeing the mind and heart should follow the voice of the speaker, as in prayer, so also in prophesying."<sup>1</sup>

I trace to this decisive opinion of John Smith a singular difference in practice between the Puritans of New England and those of England in the use made of the Bible in the time of public worship. John Robinson and his company were more deeply influenced by the ideas of Smith than they themselves, perhaps, were prepared to admit or than subsequent writers have allowed. Those who emigrated carried with them to America the form of worship and religious customs with which they had become familiar in Amsterdam and Leyden. They in turn set the note for the crowd of Puritan refugees who soon followed them from England. There was no plain reading of the Scriptures in the form of 'lessons' in the early New England Churches in the time of public worship. When the Bible was read it had at the same time to be expounded. To read a set passage without note or comment savoured of the formal and ceremonial. Nor did the people carry their pocket Bibles to service to follow the reading and hunt the text. They went to worship. To this day among the representatives of the first New England Churches the Bible is a book for the home rather than for the

<sup>1</sup> *Differences*, p. 18.

## Bibles in Time of Service

pew, whereas in Old England in religious societies representing the old Puritan stock the pews are well supplied with Bibles, and many of the worshippers habitually follow the reading, noting the minister's lapses and omissions, and then look up his text at the outset of his sermon.

## CHAPTER IX

### WHERE IS THE SEAT OF CHURCH AUTHORITY?— OPINIONS OF SMITH, JOHNSON, AINSWORTH, AND ROBINSON COMPARED

ONE of the points of difference between the Church of John Smith and that of Francis Johnson and Henry Ainsworth concerned the seat of authority in the Church. Did the supreme power, under Christ, reside in the members of the Church as a whole, or did it rest with the officers who formed the "presbytery" of the Church? When ministers and officers had been elected and ordained, did the Church surrender its power into their hands or did it retain full power in its own hands to be used if occasion should require? Allied to this matter was the question of the place and function of "ruling elders" in the Church. Francis Johnson, on first separating from the Church of England, assigned more power to the members of the particular Church he then joined than he was afterwards disposed to allow them. He fell in with the theory derived from Robert Browne and Henry Barrowe, which he found in vogue amongst the London Separatists, in accordance with which the members of the Church in their corporate capacity were supreme. Gradually, however, he veered round to the Presbyterian position and came to regard the seat of authority as residing in the eldership made

## The Seat of Church Authority

up of the pastor, teacher and lay ruling-elders. Personal inclination, early associations, and the refractory material of his Church at Amsterdam influenced him in taking up this position. He soon contended that the words in Matt. xviii. 17—"hear the church"—meant hear the duly appointed ministers and officers of the Church and submit to their ruling and authority. This was far different from the opinion arrived at by John Smith as to the power of the Church and the position of its officers. His views upon these questions were of such far-reaching influence upon the subsequent history of the Congregational Churches and certain sections of the Baptist Churches, both in England and America, that they demand careful attention.

We have seen that when Smith and Helwys took the final step of separating from the Anglican Church, their mutual friend Richard Bernard sent a paper of "oppositions" to the latter giving reasons against separation. Helwys communicated this paper to Smith, who sent a long but hastily-penned letter to Bernard in reply towards the close of the year 1607. Even in this early document he champions the cause of the whole body of members in the Church as against the Puritans, who contended that the "Eldership" or "Presbytery" had supreme authority. He states the matter in connection with the right of exercising discipline, in which the ministers and parish assemblies of England were lacking, and points out the difference between the several contending parties :—

"The Pope saith out of the 16th of Matthew that the power of binding and loosing is given to Peter and his successors the popes of Rome, and that all the bishops and priests in the world and

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

the whole Church universal receiveth binding and loosing from him.

“Nay, say the English prelates out of the 20th of John, Christ gave the power of binding and loosing to all the Apostles and their successors the Lord Bishops of England and that all the Priests and people in the Land receive binding and loosing from them in their several dioceses.

“Nay, say the Presbyterians of England out of Matt. 18, 17, the power of binding and loosing is given to the Eldership, and the people—they are bound or loosed by the Presbytery; for by the Church they understand the Presbytery.

“Nay, say we, the power of binding and loosing is given to the body of the Church even to two or three faithful people joined together in covenant.”<sup>1</sup>

Bernard seized upon this at once as being the distinctive feature of the Separatist movement. “In this,” he says, “beginneth Brownism.” It is “the first stone of that schismatical building.”<sup>2</sup> Smith’s declaration “that the power of Christ, that is, authority to preach, to administer the Sacraments, and to exercise the censures of the Church belongeth to the whole Church, yea, to every one of them and not the principal members thereof,” was set down by Bernard as “the first A. B. C. of Brownism whereupon they build all the rest of their untruths.”<sup>3</sup>

In replying to Bernard in the same year, 1608, Henry Ainsworth dissociated himself from the democratic position which Smith had laid down. He was restive under Bernard’s charges of “popular government.” He wanted to tone things down. “Popularity” in Church

<sup>1</sup> Letter of 1607 in *Paralleles*, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> *Christian Advertisements, Epistle to Reader*, 1608.

<sup>3</sup> *Christian Advertisements*, p. 88. “It was the opinion of the Smithean-Brownists here,” says Bernard, *Plaine Evidences*, p. 182.



## The A. B. C. of Brownism

government savoured too much of the Anabaptists to be respectable. As John Smith tells us:—

“Mr. Ains[worth], answering Mr. Ber[nard], saith that Mr. Ber[nard] may put this opinion, if he please, in the Criss-crosse<sup>1</sup> row of Bernardisme, he himself being the first that ever he heard to utter such a position, and afterward expoundeth what that auncient Church whereof he is teacher holdeth concerning it.”<sup>2</sup>

Ainsworth put the matter in this way:—

“Christ’s ruling power, which the Papists say is in the Pope, we say not (as this man [*i.e.*, Bernard] calumniateth us) that it is in the body of the congregation the multitude, but in Christ himself . . . we acknowledge Christ to have ordained a Presbytery or Eldership, and that in every Church, for to teach and rule them by his own word and laws, unto whom all the multitude, the members, the Saints, ought to obey and submit themselves as the Scriptures teach.”<sup>3</sup>

Again he says:—

“For popular Government (which Mr. Bernard would traduce us by) we hold it not, we approve it not, for if the multitude govern then who shall be governed? Christian liberty (which all have) is one thing, the reins of government (which some have) is another thing.”<sup>4</sup>

But Smith stood to his guns. He had no fears about the democratic principle of Church government, for he was convinced that it was the order indicated in the New Testament. Commenting on Ainsworth’s reply to Bernard, he says, “There are some particulars wherein Mr. Ainsworth hath left mee and the truth in the open playne field to shift for ourselves,”<sup>5</sup> and then he again

<sup>1</sup> This is a reference to the way the A. B. C. was spaced out on the child’s *Horn Book*.

<sup>2</sup> *Paralleles*, p. 40.

<sup>3</sup> *Counterpoison*, pp. 175—176.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 178.

<sup>5</sup> Preface to *Paralleles*.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

sets out and defends his position in forcible words. "We must remember," he says,

"that the power of Christ which we speak of is a ministerial delegated power given to man, and that the question is, 'Who is the first subject of this ministerial power? Who receive it immediately from Christ?' I say the body of the Church is the first subject of it. And I say that whatsoever the Eldership hath it hath from Christ through the body of the Church and by the Churches disposition. And this, if you deny, Mr. Ains[worth], (which I think you do not), I say you are therein departed from the faith. . . .

"We say Christ's ruling power is originally and fundamentally in the body of the Church, the multitude, and we acknowledge further that the Elders receive by delegation power from the body of the Church, which power ministerial in the hands of the Elders is not so large as that which is in the body, but it is rather a leading power than a ruling power. Neither are the Elders in all the New Testament (to my knowledge) called 'rulers,' 'archontes'; but overseers, leaders, elders, *prohistamenoi*, whereby the Holy Ghost would teach that their power is not to rule but to lead and direct. I do therefore utterly disclaim this your error, Mr. Ainsworth, as one part of 'Antichristianism' in your church, but you had need expound it well for the satisfaction of the brethren of the Separation lest herein you destroy your constitution before you be aware. . . . If you hold that lordly usurped antichristian power of your Eldership to be that ruling power which the word of God warranteth, it shall be your part to justify it and to rebuke all that gainstand it, for herein we utterly disclaim your judgment and practice. We maintain that the power of the Eldership is a leading, directing, and overseeing power, ministry or service both in the 'kingdom' and the 'priesthood' of the Church, and that the negative voice, the last definitive determining sentence is in the body of the Church whereto the Eldership is bound to yield, and that the Church may do any lawful act without the Elders, but the Elders can do nothing without the approbation of the body or contrary to the body." <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Paralleles*, p. 69.

## Democratic Principles Adopted

Here we have a clear and decisive statement of the fundamental principle of Congregational Church polity. It is interesting to note that while Johnson went further and further in the Presbyterian direction, Ainsworth<sup>1</sup> swung back to the Congregational standpoint. This divergence of opinion between the two men was one of the causes of the division which ultimately took place in the "ancient English Church at Amsterdam." John Robinson, however, followed Smith in according the chief power and authority to the Church, and not to the officers and ministers of the Church.<sup>2</sup> He adopts the arguments of Smith upon this point, and enlarges on them when seeking to justify the "Separation" against Bernard's objections. Through his followers this principle of Church order was carried to New England. Robinson also exerted a direct influence in this particular upon Henry Jacob, to whom may be traced one of the earliest (1616) Congregational Churches in England. Planted in London, Jacob's Church became the model upon which others were framed. It became the mother of many Churches, and to its source may be traced the larger section of those English Baptist Churches which are Congregational in polity.

We thus see that Smith's interpretation of the New Testament teaching concerning the power of Church members united in religious fellowship had far-reaching results. He gave clear expression to a vital idea. He took up the thought of Browne upon this matter and

<sup>1</sup> See Johnson's *Christian Plea*, 1617, and Ainsworth's *Animadversion to Mr. Richard Clifton's Advertisement*, 1613.

<sup>2</sup> *Justification of Separation*, 1610, *Works*, ii., p. 427—450.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

gave it emphasis. His decisive championship of the democratic principle in Church government was not without influence upon the subsequent history of the English and American peoples. There was a tendency to apply to civil affairs those principles by means of which the popular feeling found expression in matters of religion and Church order.

We have illustrated John Smith's opinion upon the relation of the ministry to the Church by extracts from his letter of 1607 and his book of "Paralleles" of 1609, because those two writings are closely interwoven; but the same views are expressed in his book about the "Differences of the Churches of the Separation," issued in 1608. It may possibly have been because he had got into difficulties with the "Eldership" of Johnson's Church that he gave renewed and special attention to this question. "The brethren jointly," he says, "have all power both of the kingdom and priesthood immediately from Christ, and that by virtue of the covenant God maketh with them. Therefore, when the Church wanteth an Eldership it hath nevertheless power to preach, pray, sing psalms, and so by consequence to administer the seals of the covenant; also to admonish convince, excommunicate, absolve and all other actions either of the kingdom or priesthood. When the Church has chosen and ordained herself Elders, then the Church loseth none of her former power, but still retaineth it entire to herself to use when occasion serveth."<sup>1</sup>

As to the "Eldership," or "Presbytery," itself, he now believed that "all the Elders had the same office

<sup>1</sup> *Differences*, p. 28.

## All Pastors or Elders of one Rank

of pastor, and so were all of one sort.”<sup>1</sup> They might be distinguished by different names according to their special work or qualifications, such as elders, overseers or bishops, pastors, teachers, governors, leaders, but they were not to be regarded as “several officers formally differing one from another.”<sup>2</sup> This was making rather a subtle distinction, and it cut across the practice of Johnson’s Church. Smith laid it down that “the Presbytery is uniform, consisting of officers of one sort,” but if they might be distinguished according to their several excellencies or functions what was there gained by that, beyond keeping them all to one level of power and dignity? It enabled him to lay down this conclusion: “That the Eldership, consisting of three sorts of Elders, is the invention of man, having both an anti-christian ministry and government in it. And, therefore when the Popish prelacy was suppressed and the triformed presbytery substituted, one Antichrist was put down and another set up in his place; or the beast was suppressed and his image advanced.”<sup>3</sup> I think we may attribute it to Smith’s example and influence that no official “Teacher” was ever appointed in Robinson’s<sup>4</sup> Church at Leyden, and that for some time after its arrival in that city it carried on its work without any “ruling elder” until at length William Brewster was chosen to that office.

With regard to the treasury of the Church and the deacon’s office with which Smith dealt in seven brief chapters at the close of this book, he lays down some

<sup>1</sup> *Differences*, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 27.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> Lawne’s *Prophane Schisme*, 1612, p. 88.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

practical rules for the gathering of needful funds, and indicates the purposes for which they were to be used by the deacons. "All the members of the Church are to contribute something." He preached no easy doctrine to the rich, "in the necessities of the Church the rich must sell their goods and provisions for the help of the Church." The Church was a social organism whose members were knit together by the bonds of a common spirit into a corporate fellowship. The welfare of each was bound up with the good of all. If the "rich brethren" do not contribute "they are unworthy members of the Church, and unnatural parts of the body, and are to be censured according to the rule."<sup>1</sup> Special prayer and thanksgiving were to be offered up at the time of the collection: "Alms or contributions to the Treasury must be sanctified by prayer and thanksgiving." "The treasury is to be collected every first day of the week when the whole Church cometh together to break bread." Many people would think it strange in these days if notice were given that only those in membership with the Church were expected to contribute to the collection. But that was the principle laid down by John Smith. "There ought to be a separation in alms and contribution to the treasury as well as in other parts of our spiritual communion; therefore, they that are without [*i.e.*, not in membership] if they give anything must lay it apart several from the treasury, and it must be employed to common use."<sup>2</sup>

John Robinson agreed with Smith on this point, and through his Church the practice of some of the New

<sup>1</sup> *Differences*, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.



# The Use of Church Money

England Churches with regard to the collection was influenced in the same direction. "Master Robinson<sup>1</sup> hath followed Master Smith in his doctrine and practice about the separation in alms, and so hath one special kind of separation more than Master Johnson or Master Ainsworth in their companies do practice, and therefore might seem to have a more holy treasury." A modern example is furnished by the Churches of the "Christian Brethren" in England at the present time which will only accept contributions from their own members.

The general instructions for the employment of the money and goods collected throw some light upon the condition of the Church at Amsterdam:—

1. "Maintenance of the Elders, especially such among them as are most painful [*i.e.* painstaking] in the word and doctrine. The Elders that are of ability ought not to require maintenance of the church, but ought rather to contribute to the treasury.

"The Elders may sometime upon good grounds work with their hands for avoiding offence and helping the Church.

2. "Maintenance of the widows and by consequence other officers that want maintenance.

3. "Relief of the poor brethren, also orphans and widows of brethren deceased, and that not only of their own but of other true Churches, especially of them from whom they received the faith.

4. "Provision for necessary uses as places, vessels, bread, wine, and other implements for the common necessities of the whole body.

"Query. Whether, if the charge of bread and wine be very great as it falleth out in some countries and some years, and the officers and poor want maintenance, the Lord's Supper may not be deferred and not be administered every Lord's Day."<sup>2</sup>

This is a flash of light upon the hardships which these

<sup>1</sup> Lawne's *Prophane Schisme*, 1612, p. 88.

<sup>2</sup> *Differences*, pp. 30—31.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

refugees were called upon to endure. They were accustomed to a rough plenty in England, but in Holland they found the cost of living increased. It took some time to fall into the ways of the new life and find suitable and remunerative employment. Meanwhile, those who had sold their little estates in England found their stock melting away, while the necessities of the Church were for the time being increased. In these circumstances Smith was inclined to put the practical needs of the Church and its poor before the ceremony of the Supper, dear as that was to their hearts and helpful to their lives.

The book of "Differences" concludes with "Certayne Demandes wherto wee desire direct and sound answer with proof from the Scriptures." This is a formidable string of sixty-one questions such as the following :—

"Whether the holy originals do not contain more matter than the prophets and apostles that wrote them did conceive ?

"Whether metre rhythm and tune be not quenching the Spirit ?

"Whether voluntary be not as necessary in tune and words as in matter ?

"Whether the Eldership hath a negative voice in the church that nothing can be concluded without them ?

"Whether the seals of the covenant may not be administered there being yet no Elders in office ? "

When replying to this book Ainsworth complained that Smith had not set out the differences between the English Churches at Amsterdam with sufficient precision, and then, glancing at this long line of notes of interrogation, reminding him of a string of fish-hooks, he says, with a touch of humour, he should not angle for others to set them out as he has done by his serried row of "demands" at the end of his book.

## CHAPTER X

SMITH BECOMES A BAPTIST—CONTROVERSY ON  
INFANT BAPTISM WITH RICHARD CLIFTON—  
SMITH'S BAPTISM OF HIMSELF—MODE OF BAP-  
TIZING—WAS IT BY IMMERSION?

THE incident in the career of Smith which excited greatest attention and led to the conferring upon him of the distinctive designation "Se-baptist," is connected with the next advance in his opinions. He had, up to now, been pretty confident that he and his companions were right in constituting their new and true Church by means of a mutual covenant. It was one of his chief grounds for separating from the Anglican Church that its "parish assemblies" were not constituted by covenant. But now a fresh idea laid hold upon his mind. He noticed that while the Old Testament had much to say about the covenant, the New Testament passed it over, and indicated baptism upon repentance and profession of faith as the method followed by the Apostles in admitting members and constituting Churches. He began to question whether the Separatists after all had constituted their Churches aright. They had followed the plan adopted by Israel in restoring true worship after a period of idolatry, rather than the plain instruction of Jesus and the practice of the Apostles. While rejecting the the Church of England as a false Church<sup>d</sup> they were yet

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

retaining the baptism which they had received in that Church. They retained its baptism while they renounced its orders, and compelled those who had received episcopal ordination to be reordained in the congregation which they were specially called to serve.

Smith saw how illogical this was. He declared that if the Church of England were really a false Church then her baptism must be false. But he went further than this, and repudiated infant baptism as being without warrant in the New Testament. It seemed clear to him that in order to set up a true Church according to the New Testament model he and his company would have to begin all over again, and, what is more, would have to begin by baptism. It was not the first time that the question had arisen among English Separatists, but hitherto they had, with very few exceptions, shirked it. To baptize their members anew would link them on in the popular estimation with the Anabaptists, and that was a title of such ill odour that they sought by every means to avoid it. But John Smith was not the man to be frightened by names when conscience and conviction called him to a particular course. In this case he went straight on, and such were his suasive powers that he carried his fellow members with him, even into Anabaptism. He overcame the difficulty of finding an administrator by first baptizing himself and then Thomas Helwys and the rest, each making their particular confessions. Then they proceeded to elect pastor and officers anew, thus making a clean start and reviving once more, as they firmly believed, a Church after the primitive apostolic pattern amongst English-speaking people.

We cannot say with certainty what led Smith to turn

## A Fresh Start

his attention to the question of baptism. It has been conjectured that he came under the influence of the Dutch Mennonites thus early in his sojourn at Amsterdam. The followers of Menno Simons (1492—1559), one of the most engaging of the Anabaptist leaders, were numerous and influential at Amsterdam, and Smith soon came into touch with them. Helwys acknowledges that they were the means of bringing himself and his friends out of some grievous errors to the light of truth. It is not at all unlikely that Smith was influenced both by the Mennonites and by those of his own nation who had become Anabaptists in Holland before his arrival in that country. Enoch Clapham was troubled with Anabaptists in the Church of English refugees to which he ministered at Amsterdam in 1597.<sup>1</sup> In his Church the question as to the validity of the baptism given in the Churches of Rome and England was thoroughly debated. He came to the conclusion that it was not to be repeated, for if that baptism “be wholly fallen then we must be all unbaptised till some other John Baptist or Christ himself come down again to begin and lay the foundation anew, except it be lawful for every man to baptise and then I see not why others before us as well as now did not well enough baptise.” If they had only considered “the absurd errors” following upon the contention that Romish and Anglican baptism was invalid “many poor English souls would not so have hunted after new baptisms.”<sup>2</sup>

Besides these members of Clapham’s Church, there

<sup>1</sup> See Enoch Clapham’s *Little tractate entitled The Carpenter*, dated July 7, 1597. Sig. E.

<sup>2</sup> *Theological Axioms*, by Enoch Clapham, 1597. Conclusion, 5. Sig. B. iii.

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were many from Robert Browne's Church at Middelburg and a few from the Church of Johnson and Ainsworth who fell away to Anabaptism. What is more likely than that some of these English Anabaptists<sup>1</sup> should come into touch with John Smith now that he was at variance with the Church of which Francis Johnson was pastor? However that may be, we are able to trace the course of the controversy on this subject from the pamphlets on both sides printed in connection with this discussion. It was with his old friend Richard Clifton that he argued the matter, for Francis Johnson declined to enter into controversy with him directly.

Clifton (1553—1616) was for many years rector of Babworth, in Nottinghamshire. He was a heart-stirring preacher, but was deprived of his living for nonconformity to the ceremonies of the Church. John Smith had been intimate with him in England, and was the means of convincing him that the Separatist Church was a true Church. He had also discussed with him in writing questions relating to excommunication and other points of Church order. It appears that Clifton and "divers others" purposed to have "committed their souls" to Smith, or, as we should say, proposed to join his Church on their arrival in Holland, but changed their minds on account of errors he had broached likely to bring the cause into ill-favour. Smith's advance to the Anabaptist position caused still greater consternation among his old friends.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. also *Royall Exchange, etc.*, by John Payne, Haarlem, 1597, p. 22. "I wishe you beware of the dangerouse opinions of suche Englyshe Anabaptists bred here as whose parsons in part with more store of there letters doth crepe and spreade amongst you in cittie and contrey."



## Eager Discussions

It was probably early in the year 1609<sup>1</sup> that Smith and his company reconstituted their Church anew by baptism. They were eager to spread the light, as we see from Clifton's account of the way he was drawn into the controversy:—

“Presently after you [*i.e.*, Smith] were fallen into these gross errors came Mr. [Edward] Southworth and Mr. [Hugh] Bromhead, two of your followers, to my chamber (as they said) in kindness to see me and entered conference with me concerning these opinions, saying that they had heard that I had been inclined that way when I was in England, with some persuasive speeches to consider of this your new walking. Saying also that you were willing to confer with me and did wish that either I would come to you, or else, if I were willing, you would take pains to come to me. To whom I answered that I never had any thoughts of embracing such opinions, neither was willing to have any conference with you thereabout. Which when they heard me so to say they further did solicit me to write with you about these points, and said that you would as willingly and friendly write with me thereof, as you did in England in our former conference concerning excommunication and other differences then between you and me, offering if I would not begin that yet I would vouchsafe to read and answer your writing. To whom I said again that I would not write first or require your writing (for I thought not to have any dealing with you) yet being so importuned I told them that I would be content to read it if you sent it to me, but for answer thereunto I promised none.”<sup>2</sup>

This gave Smith an opening, and he at once sent in a paper as follows:—

“Certain reasons propounded to Mr. Rich. Clifton concerning the two Propositions following:—

“I. That infants are not to be baptized.

“(1) Because there is neither precept nor example in the New

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Scheffer concluded it was in October, 1608; see Dexter's *England and Holland of the Pilgrims*, p. 453.

<sup>2</sup> *The Plea for Infants, etc.*, by Clifton, 1610, p. 4.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

Testament of any infants that were baptized by John or Christ's disciples. Only they that did confess their sins and confess their faith were baptized.

"(2) Because Christ commandeth to make Disciples by teaching them and then to baptize them, but infants cannot by doctrine become Christ's disciples and so cannot by the rule of Christ be baptized.

"(3) Because if infants be baptized the carnal seed is baptized and so the seal of the covenant is administered to them unto whom the covenant appertaineth not, which is a profanation.

"II. That Antichristians<sup>1</sup> converted are to be admitted into the true Church by baptism.

"(1) Because Churches are so to be constituted now after the defection of Antichrist, as they were first erected by the Apostles. But in the constitution of Churches the Apostles received in the members by baptism; ergo, so must we do now.

"(2) Because true baptism is but one; but the baptism of Antichrist is not true baptism and so not that one baptism of Christ, but all members of Christ must have true baptism.

"(3) Because as the false Church is rejected and the true erected, the false Ministry forsaken and the true received: so false worship (and by consequence baptism) must be renounced and the true baptism assumed.

"JOHN SMYTH."

After Clifton had received this bombshell he had some conversation upon the questions at issue with Mrs. [Ursula] Bywater, whom he describes as "a gentlewoman that hath embraced your errors." "I urged her," he says, "to be careful over herself how she entertained your new opinions, affirming that I was persuaded they were grievous errors, and prayed her instantly to stay awhile until your 'Positions' might be answered, assuring her that I could by God's help defend

<sup>1</sup> The term "Antichristian," which seems to us harsh, had become a mere conventional phrase amongst the Separatists to designate Roman Catholics and those in England who adhered to the prelatical party.

## Clifton Defends Infant Baptism

this truth we stand for against you.”<sup>1</sup> Accordingly Clifton set to work to reply to the two propositions of Smith. He defended the baptism of infants and declared it to be “utterly unlawful” to re-baptize “such as have been formerly baptized in the Apostate Churches of Christians.” This reply is dated March 14th, 1608-9,<sup>2</sup> which gives us a fixed point before which Smith had adopted Baptist opinions.

In ten days Smith had completed an elaborate answer to the arguments contained in Clifton’s reply. He sent on a written copy of this answer, dated March 24, 1608-9,<sup>3</sup> to Clifton, who forthwith began a second reply. When Clifton had almost completed his second answer, Smith, without consulting Clifton, put their “former private passages” upon this topic to the press under the provocative title of “The Character of the Beast.” Here the word “character” is used in the original sense of a mark or stamp, and is intended to denote the baptism usually received in the Churches of England and Rome. This is made clear by the quotation on the title page of Rev. xiii. 16, and Rev. xiv. 9, 10: “If any man receive the mark in his forehead or in his hand the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God.”

This little pamphlet is poorly printed on poor paper. The printer’s name is not mentioned; we simply have the phrase, “printed 1609.” It looks as though Smith had difficulty, either from lack of means or from other causes, in getting his books published. The tone of the work is not at all pleasing. The very fact that the leaders in

<sup>1</sup> Clifton’s *Plea for Infants, etc.*, 1610, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Character of the Beast*, 1609, p. 68, and *The Plea*, 1610, p. 213.

<sup>3</sup> “I end writing this, March 24, 1608, John Smyth,” *Character, etc.* p. 71. This would be April 3, 1609, in modern reckoning.

# Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

the ancient Separatist Church had entered into a conspiracy of silence against him made him present his case with the sharpest possible edge. He would smooth nothing down. He is vehement and absolute. Of the Separatist Church he says :—

“ Although once in our ignorance we have acknowledged her a true Church, yet now, being better informed, we revoke that our erroneous judgment, and protest against her as well for her false constitution as for her false ministry, worship, and government.” <sup>1</sup>

Then a little later on he breaks out against the leaders in these terms :—

“ We require them, nay, we charge them yea we challenge them, to the defence of their errors. Lo! we protest against them to be a false Church, falsely constituted in the baptism of infants and their own unbaptized estate. We protest against them to have a false worship of reading books. We protest against them to have a false government of a triformed presbytery. We protest against them to have a false ministry of Doctors or Teachers. Finally we protest against them that seeing their constitution is false therefore there is no one ordinance of the Lord true among them. These things we have published and of these things we require answer, for we proclaim against them as they proclaim against their own mother England, that the Separation, the youngest and the fairest daughter of Rome, is an harlot, ‘ for as is the mother so is the daughter.’ ” <sup>2</sup>

Truly, the epithets which Barrowe and his followers directed against the Anglican Church were now coming home to roost.

The fact that John Smith baptized himself has been established beyond question by those who have looked into the matter in recent years, though it was doubted

<sup>1</sup> *Character of the Beast*: Epistle to Reader, ii.

<sup>2</sup> *Character, etc.*: Epistle to Reader, p. v.

## Smith's Act of Self-Baptism

by some of the older Baptist writers. John Robinson's account was derived at first hand from those who belonged to the Church of Smith and Helwys.

"If<sup>1</sup> the church" he says, "be gathered by baptism then will Mr. Helwisse's church appear to all men to be built upon the sand, considering the baptism it had and hath: which was, as I have heard from themselves on this manner. Mr. Smyth, Mr. Helwisse and the rest, having utterly dissolved and disclaimed their former church state and ministry, came together to erect a new church by baptism unto which they also ascribed so great virtue as that they would not so much as pray together before they had it. And after some straining of courtesy who should begin, and that of John Baptist [I have need to be baptized of thee and comest thou to me] Matt. 3, 14 misalleged, Mr. Smyth baptized first himself and next Mr. Helwisse and so the rest making their particular confessions."

His opponents at once fastened upon this unusual proceeding. They put a question to him which in other connections he had been fond of putting to them. Where is your warrant from Scripture for this act? Though he could produce no express command from the New Testament for a man to baptize himself, yet Smith was at pains to justify his action. "Now for baptizing a man's self," he says,

"there is as good warrant as for a man Churching himself. For two men singly are no church; jointly they are a Church and they both of them put a Church upon themselves; so may two men put baptism upon themselves. For as both those persons unchurched yet have power to assume the Church each of them for himself with others in communion, so each of them unbaptized hath power to assume the baptism for himself with others in communion. And as Abraham and John Baptist and all the proselytes after Abraham's example, (Exod. xii. 48) did administer

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, iii., 168.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

the Sacrament upon themselves, so may any man raised up after the Apostasy of Antichrist, in the recovering of the Church by baptism, administer it upon himself in communion with others. . . . Every Priest going to sacrifice washed himself in the Laver at the door of the Tabernacle of the congregation, which was a type of baptism the door of the church (Tit. 3, 5). Every Master of a family administered the Passover to himself and all of his family. The priest daily sacrificed for himself and others. A man cannot baptize others into the Church himself being out of the Church, therefore, it is lawful for a man to baptize himself together with others in communion and this warrant is a plerophory for the practice of that which is done by us.”<sup>1</sup>

To the position here laid down Thomas Helwys, John Murton and a section of Smith’s followers consistently adhered, but he himself saw reason to change his opinion on this point in order to avoid some consequences which he had not foreseen. Clifton put the case in this way: “If you that baptize yourself (being but an ordinary man) may this do, then may another do the like and so every one baptize himself.”<sup>2</sup> He also pushed Smith’s argument that “baptism is the visible form of the Church” to an unexpected conclusion:—

“If baptism be the form then it may come to pass that one man may be a visible Church as he that first in the company baptizeth himself, he is a Church being baptized, for he that hath the form upon him must needs be the thing formed. And so Mr. Smyth was a Church when he baptized himself which is absurd to think.”<sup>3</sup>

This would be individualism run wild, and Smith, though democratic in spirit and a champion of liberty, had a keen sense of order and fitness in all Church actions.

<sup>1</sup> *Character of the Beast*, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> *The Plea*, 1610, p. 178.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.



## The Title Se-Baptist

The arguments and objections urged by Clifton against self-baptism seem to have weighed with Smith, and though he held to his conviction of the necessity of adult baptism, we shall see that he came to renounce his act of self-baptism which had made him notorious.

The news of John Smith's advance to the Anabaptist position was not long in reaching his former friends and acquaintances in England. He was not one to hide his light under a bushel. Clifton gives it as one of his reasons for replying to "The Character of the Beast" that "the same book is sent over into our own country and is spread abroad into the hands of many."<sup>1</sup> A copy came to the hands of Richard Bernard when he was engaged on his reply to Ainsworth's "Counterpoysion" and, it is to Bernard, in that reply, that I trace the nickname "Se-baptist" by which John Smith has been distinguished from others of that name.

Bernard tells us humorously why he coined the phrase:—

"If any ask why I do give him a new title to his old name: my answer is he wanted I know a Godfather when he was Christened againe; now it is an ancient custome to name then the childe and the susceptrors to give it. Indeed I was not requested by this Childe's Parents to be an undertaker, neverthelesse upon so extraordinarie an Act I will be somewhat exorbitant with myself to cal him Mr. John Smith, the Anabaptisticall Se-baptist. Notorious acts wee may reade have made men remarkable and have gotten them names and titles for a memoriall of the facts and deeds done. Why should not hee then obtain what worthily he hath deserved? He is Anabaptisticall for rebaptization, and he is a *Se-baptist* because he did baptise himself. It is more than Christ would do. But he could find no whither to go for Baptisme. In some Churches it was false, as he imagined; in some true, but not lawfully to be

<sup>1</sup> *The Plea, etc.*, preface.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

received because of some Heresies.<sup>1</sup> But is his Baptisme true ?<sup>2</sup>

Bernard uses the term Se-baptist more than once. He places it upon the title-page of his book<sup>3</sup> and writes of Smith with a touch of mockery in this strain :—

“ He hath founded a new Church, he hath (if you will believe him) recovered the true baptism and the true matter and form of a true Church, which now is only to be found pure among a company of Se-baptists. Mr. Smith will hold ever this word ‘ Se ’ to himself, for in going into Brownism he was a separatist, he held differing opinions from them, and now that he is in Anabaptism he is a Se-baptist, he wholly goeth not with that heretical sect. It may seem he intendeth to have an oar in every boat and a piece of every profession, holding all and none wholly, and yet will suppose himself the best, as if he were an unerring reformer having an infallible rule *in scrinio pectoris* to be universally good.”<sup>4</sup>

Joseph Hall also soon became aware of Smith’s action and saw the logical force of his argument. Smith put the point briefly in this form :—

“ To say thus : England hath a false constitution ; England hath a true baptism  
“ is as much as to say thus : England hath a false constitution ; England hath a true constitution  
“ which is to contradict.”<sup>5</sup>

Hall turned the argument against the Separatists. “ Either you must go forward to Anabaptism,” said he to John Robinson, “ or, come back to us. All your Rabbins cannot answer that charge of your re-baptized

<sup>1</sup> ‘ As among the Anabaptists.’ Marginal note *in loco*.

<sup>2</sup> *Plaine Evidences*, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> *Plaine Evidences*, 1610. Title page and preface.

<sup>4</sup> *Plaine Evidences*, p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> *Character, etc., Epistle to Reader*.

## Re-Baptized Separatists

brother : if we be a True Church you must return, if we be not (as a False Church is no Church of God) you must re-baptize. If our baptism be good then is our Constitution good." <sup>1</sup>

Another contemporary book which refers to the baptism of Smith was issued in London in 1610 under the title "A Description of the Church of Christ with her peculiar Privileges." The author, who only gives his initials, I. H., I take to have been a Familist. The members of the Family of Love, though they believed the older Churches were in many things corrupt, would not separate from them, but remained in fellowship quietly awaiting the time when God would raise up extraordinary and special messengers and prophets to introduce the needed reforms in religion. The action of Smith in restoring the primitive baptism would interest them, but the question would arise as to whether he were an extraordinary prophet of God, and to such an office Smith laid no claim. In his book I. H. sought to maintain the truth, as he conceived it, "against certain anabaptistical and erroneous opinions, very hurtful and dangerous to weak Christians, maintained and practised by one Master John Smith sometime a Preacher in Lincolnshire and a Company of English People with him now at Amsterdam in Holland whom he hath there with himself rebaptized." <sup>2</sup> The running title of the work is "To the new Sect of Rebaptised Separatists."

The author's statement of what led him to write his book is of interest, because it shows us how eager the members of Smith's Church were to discuss matters of

<sup>1</sup> Hall's *Common Apologie*, s. xi.

<sup>2</sup> *Description of the Church of Christ*, London, 1610.

# Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

religion. We can picture the scene to which this vivid passage refers:—

“And now, dear friends, to let you understand my cause of writing to the afore named Master John Smith and his company. It fell out of late that I, being in company of some of them, had some conference with them wherein they seemed very well affected to the things that I spake unto them. One of them answering me in these words: ‘I could willingly let all these things which you have said go down into me but only the going to the assemblies’<sup>1</sup>; another of them answered him instantly, ‘You heard what he said for that.’ And so they requested me that I would set the things down in writing which had been said and they would either answer or subscribe unto it. Which thing I thought good to perform.”<sup>2</sup>

There is one shrewd remark by this writer bearing upon the act of Smith’s self-baptism which is worth quotation. “It was<sup>3</sup> wonder,” he says, “you would not receive your baptisme first from some one of the Elders of the Dutch Anabaptists, but you will be holier then all, and see how you have marred all.” Before this book was issued from the press Smith himself had been struck by the same thought, and was already in treaty with the Dutch Mennonites for admission to their fellowship.

The year 1609 must have been a busy one for John Smith. In addition to his controversy on the question of baptism with Clifton and Robinson and the publication of his “Character of the Beast,” he saw through the press his important work, entitled “Paralleles, Censures, Observations Aperteyning to

<sup>1</sup> *I.e.*, going to service at the parish churches; the Separatists avoided the word “church” in this connection.

<sup>2</sup> *Description of the Church of Christ, Epistle to the Citizens of the Heavenly Jerusalem*, p. ii.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

## Paralleles and Censures

three several Writings.”<sup>1</sup> We have his own explanation of the singular title: “I have thought meet,” he says, “not barely to publish this lettre but parallele-wise to compare Mr. Bernard’s book Mr. Ainsworth’s answer and this my lettre [*i.e.*, his letter of 1607 to Richard Bernard] together, as also to annexe a few animadversions and observations aperteyning thereunto that by this means the agreement and difference being discovered the truth may appeare where it is.”<sup>2</sup> This book was designed to establish the general grounds of the Separation, to rebut the arguments put forward in Bernard’s “Separatists’ Schism,” and to show that the constitution of the Church of England was false. As we have already noted, Ainsworth had written an answer to Bernard which had led that ready writer to take up his pen again. “When,” says Bernard, “I was writing over my reply to this Mr. Ainsworth which I had thought should have gone forth so alone, I received by God’s good providence the Se-baptist’s booke, I meane Mr. Smith’s answere also, so, that it might not boast like an Heathenish Goliath against God’s Church without an encounter, I have therefore placed him and ranked him in his due order as he came, and made answere thereto as is meet. . . . I heare of Mr. Robinson’s answere also [Robinson’s Justification of Separation, 1610]; if it had come in he should also have been replied vpon. Though I be a weake man and my weapons be against these three Captaines of three Companies, and but a stone in a sling, yet shall Israel prevaile. The truth is strong against all enemies whosoever they be.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Printed 1609.

<sup>2</sup> Preface to *Paralleles*.

<sup>3</sup> *Plaine Evidences*, 1610, preface, iii.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

Thus no sooner was one answer out than the ball was tossed back in a second reply. Smith might well begin to grow weary of the wordiness of controversy. Even Francis Johnson, who at the outset kept aloof from this discussion about baptism, joined in the fray as soon as Smith's "Character of the Beast" saw the light. It is true he studiously avoided mentioning Smith by name in what he had to say about the matter, but in his "Brief Treatise conteyning some grounds and reasons against two errours of the Anabaptists," issued in 1609, he clearly had Smith and his company in mind. The "two errors" were the "positions" laid down by Smith in controversy with Clifton, "the one concerning baptism of infants, the other concerning anabaptism of elder people." On these points Johnson declared "that baptism *is* to be administered to infants, being the children of the faithful, and that baptism received in the Apostatical Churches of Christians, as of Rome and the like, is not to be renounced and a new to be repeated again." As to the baptism of Smith's Church, he says "their latter washing of themselves is not Baptisme approved of God in His word ; but a vayne observation of their own taken vp by the will and invention of man."<sup>1</sup>

### THE MODE OF BAPTIZING

It will be noticed that Johnson referred to the baptism of Smith and his companions as a "washing." The question arises as to what was the mode of baptizing adopted by Smith. Was it by immersion or by affusion?

<sup>1</sup> *A Brief Treatise, etc.*, 1609, p. 22, in the University Library, Cambridge.



## Mode of Baptizing

The references to it by his contemporaries point to the latter method. Robinson writing against Helwys calls it "a new outward washing," and refers to his adherents as "double washers." There is not the slightest hint or suggestion in the writings of Smith that dipping was necessary. The Mennonite practice of pouring a little water upon the head of the candidate from the hands of the administrator seems to have been followed. When the union of "the remainders of Smyth's company" with the Mennonites was consummated, the baptism given in Smith's Church was accepted without question. The rite was administered within doors, either privately or in the usual place of meeting in face of the congregation. It was probably left to the discretion of the administrator to arrange the details. Interest was centred in the act itself rather than in the manner of doing it. In some cases it may have been accompanied by a gentle rubbing movement to symbolise a cleansing, for that idea was more prominent than the thought of being buried in baptism and rising to the new life in Christ. But no precise description of the method adopted by the English Anabaptists has yet come to light.

It was not till the year 1640<sup>1</sup> that a member of Henry Jessey's Church in London, Richard Blunt by name, becoming convinced that baptism "ought to be by dipping in the body unto the water resembling burial and rising again," brought this aspect of the matter into prominence. This Church had been founded in 1616 by Henry Jacob, and was Calvinistic in doctrine. It was amongst those who had been connected with this

<sup>1</sup> *Transactions of Baptist History Society*, vol. i., January, 1910. Documents edited by Dr. W. T. Whitley, p. 232, etc.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

Church that the practice of immersion first came into vogue. Richard Blunt was sent over into the Netherlands to receive baptism in that manner, for immersion had been introduced into Holland in 1619 by the Collegianten, an off-shoot from the Mennonites. It was to Jan Batten, their teacher at Leyden, that Blunt applied for baptism. The Collegianten were Arminians and unorthodox in theology, but thoroughly tolerant. The Calvinistic opinions of Blunt would be no bar in their eyes to his baptism, for they regarded the rite as admitting into the Church universal and not into their particular society.

Thus the practice of immersion was introduced into England and quickly gained ground. Whereas the Declaration of Faith issued by Thomas Helwys and his friends in 1611 speaks of "baptism or washing with water," the Confession of Faith issued by the representatives of seven "particular" or "Calvinistic" Baptist Churches in London in 1644 prescribes immersion as the mode of baptism. It is the first "confession" to insist upon "dipping or plunging the body under water." The only passage in the writings of the earlier English Baptists which I know of that points to immersion is to be found in Leonard Busher's "Religion's Peace or a Plea for Liberty of Conscience," originally issued in 1614. "Christ," he says, "commanded his disciples to teach all nations and baptize them; that is to preach the word of salvation to every creature of all sorts of nations that are worthy and willing to receive it. And such as shall willingly and gladly receive it, he hath commanded *to be baptized in the water, that is, dipped for dead in the water.* And therefore the Apostle saith,

## Unitarian Baptists

‘Else what shall they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead be not raised why are they baptized for the dead?’ 1 Cor. xv. 19. And therefore he saith, ‘we are buried then with him by baptism,’ Rom. vi. 4; Col. ii. 12.”<sup>1</sup>

This passage alone is not decisive, and we have to remember that Busher was an individualist in religious opinion, representing no large body of people, and that we only know of this book through the reprint of 1646, as all original copies seem to be lost. Immersion was practised by the Unitarian Baptists of Switzerland as early as 1525, and by those of Poland before the year 1550, in accordance with what they held to be the usage of the Primitive Church and the general indications in the New Testament as to the manner of dispensing that rite. The practice seems to have been derived by the Rhynsburgers or Collegianten from the Polish Socinian Baptists. The first to be “dipt at Rynsburg” was the saintly and loveable John Everston Geesteranus (1586—1622). He and his brother Peter were sorely persecuted because their views “favoured the tenets of Socinus and the Anabaptists.”<sup>2</sup> In 1620 the Rector of the College at Rakow in Poland, a Socinian foundation, invited Geesteranus to take up a post as tutor in that famous school of learning, but he preferred to remain in his own country earning his livelihood by weaving.

<sup>1</sup> *Tracts on Liberty of Conscience*. Hanserd Knollys Society, 1846, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> Wallace, *Antitrinitarian Biography*, ii., 550—558, and Barclay’s *Inner Life, etc.*, p. 73.

## APPENDIX TO CHAPTER X

### NOTE ON THE BAPTISMAL FORMULA

Dr. Dexter, picturing to himself the act of Smith's baptism and the formation of his new Church, imagines the little company ranging themselves round a three-legged stool, on which a basin of water was placed, according to the scene in an old engraving after Cornelius van Sichem, representing the baptism of an Anabaptist. The company are gathered in a large chamber of a dwelling-house, then "without preliminary prayer Smyth dipped up water in his hand and poured it over his own forehead in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost."<sup>1</sup> He takes it for granted that the orthodox formula was used, but in this point he is mistaken. There is contemporary evidence that these were not the words of administration. Writing early in 1610 Richard Bernard said <sup>2</sup>:—

"Their baptism is false because it wanteth the true form, for they held not the words of Christ's commanding so to baptise ; viz. in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Now the form being false it cannot be true."

He puts in the margin as his authority this reference:—"Witnesse Ia. Wh. and other moe," which may refer to Jane White, sister-in-law of John Robinson. It is clear that Bernard had access to first hand information sent from Amsterdam to old friends at Worksop.

There are also indications that Helwys in administering baptism did not consider it necessary to adhere to the precise form of words sanctioned by the usage of the Catholic Church, and inserted at the close of St. Matthew's Gospel—"in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." Of course he would not be aware of the fact, which has since been demonstrated, that those words were an early addition to the gospel in

<sup>1</sup> *England and Holland of the Pilgrims*, p. 456.

<sup>2</sup> *Plaine Evidences*, p. 315.

# The Baptismal Formula

the interests of a special doctrinal development, but he noticed that in the cases of baptism referred to in the New Testament there was no mention of this formula, whereas there were instances of disciples being baptized "in the name of the Lord Jesus," This scriptural example would be quite enough to warrant the simpler Christian formula for Helwys and his companions against the usage of the Catholic and Anglican Churches. The early Baptists allowed a variety in the baptismal sentence. Smith himself sanctions the customary formula in one decisive passage:—

"The true constitution of the Church is of a new creature baptized into the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost; the false constitution is of infants baptized."<sup>1</sup>

Robinson consistently held to the triple formula.

"The baptism both in England and Rome is, in the essential causes of it—the matter water, the form baptizing into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost—Christ's baptism and ordinance, though in the administration it be antichrist's device."<sup>2</sup>

So he argued in 1610, and upon that ground retained the baptism received in the Anglican Church without repetition.

"Since the essential form of institution is retained in the baptism in England and the doctrine of the Trinity sincerely held, into whose name all persons are baptized indefinitely, the particular errors in that Church touching the manner of worshiping God, or touching the uses or ends of baptism (which are not of the essence), cannot make the baptism in itself cease to be indefinite."<sup>3</sup>

Helwys opposed Robinson on this point, and in the course of his reply remarked:—

"We pass by *your form of words* because we think you will not stand upon it in that you see there is no certain form of words held.—Acts 10, 48, and 19, 5."

He refers to the cases of baptizing in "the name of the Lord" and "in the name of the Lord Jesus." He was so little disposed to attach importance to a precise form in the external ceremony of baptism as to say:—

"If a man be in prison or any place and be converted to the Lord and

<sup>1</sup> *Character of the Beast, Epistle to Reader*, p. ii.

<sup>2</sup> *Justification of Separation, Works*, ii., p. 413.

<sup>3</sup> *Justification, etc., Works*, ii., p. 458.

# Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

would be baptized with water but cannot, he is accepted with God who accepts the will for the deed—2 Cor. 8, 12.”<sup>1</sup>

The General Baptists a generation later allowed the alternative forms. In “A brief Confession or Declaration of Faith,” subscribed in 1660 by certain Elders, Deacons, and Brethren met at London, baptism “in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit or in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” is enjoined.<sup>2</sup> So also among the Calvinistic Baptists of Somersetshire and adjacent parts in 1656 it was declared to be the duty of every man and woman who has repented from dead works and has faith toward God

“to be baptized . . . in the name of our Lord Jesus . . . or in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”—Articles 24 and 26 in “A Confession of Faith of several congregations of Christ in the county of Somerset, Crosby, I. Appendix, p. 45.

<sup>1</sup> *Mystery of Iniquity*, 1612, p. 140.

<sup>2</sup> Grantham's *Christianismus Primitivus* ii., p. 67.



## CHAPTER XI

### LETTER OF HUGH AND ANNE BROMEHEAD—ORDER OF SERVICE IN SMITH'S CHURCH AND IN THE CHURCH AT PLYMOUTH, NEW ENGLAND

WE are fortunate in having an independent account of the general procedure in the Church of which John Smith was pastor at the stage in its history dealt with in the preceding chapter. This is to be found in a letter from Hugh and Anne Bromehead "to their loving cousin William Hamerton at London." Attention was called to this document by the Rev. Joseph Hunter, and I am able to confirm his conjecture that Hugh Bromehead was a clergyman and belonged to the family of that name settled at North Wheatley, in Nottinghamshire. This is made clear from the will of his father, Henry Bromehead, yeoman of North Wheatley, dated January 6, 1588.

From the preamble to this document<sup>1</sup> we can see that Hugh Bromehead's father belonged to that serious, steady-going class of Englishmen with a keen sense of duty which has done so much for this country. Amongst other bequests he left 6s. 8d. to "the poore mans boxe of Northe Wheatley," and to "every pore howsholder in North Wheatley and South Wheatley vi.d apece."

<sup>1</sup> In the District Probate Registry at York.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

Besides bequests to other of his children there is the following :—

“ I give unto Hugho Bromehead my son all those my messuages, buildings, lands, meadows, tofts, crofts, enclosures, pastures, with their appurtenances, in Bole in the county of Nottingham to him and his heirs for ever.”

This will is witnessed by “ Hugo Bromehead, clerke.”

It will be seen that Hugh was comfortably provided for, and that his connection with Bole and Wheatley, a few miles from Gainsborough on the old road to Bawtry, and Scrooby, placed him in a favourable position to come into touch with those who made the bold venture of setting up Churches in those parts separate from the State Church. The will of Edmund Helwys disclosed some relationship between the families of Helwys and Hamerton, and we now see that the Hamertons and Bromeheads were connected. To some extent the Churches gathered under Smith and Robinson were family affairs.

When news reached William Hamerton in London from his kinsman Nicholas that Hugh Bromehead, with others, had migrated to Amsterdam, and adopted singular religious opinions, his interest was aroused. He wrote a letter, dated July 13,<sup>1</sup> which I assign to the year 1609, asking why they had gone to Amsterdam, urging them to return, which, he made no question, would be pleasing to God and a comfort to friends, expressing the fear that conceited fancies and sundry errors, together with self-willed minds, had led them into those by-paths ; desiring to know in what

<sup>1</sup> “ Beloved cosen we received a lettre from you dated xij. of Julie.”—Bromehead's letter.

## Letter from Hugh Bromehead

way the Church of England could be reformed, and requesting them to forward him any book which explained their present settled government in Church matters. To this letter Hugh, together with his wife Anne, sent a long reply. In form and phrasing it gives evidence of the influence of Smith upon his followers, and echoes the sentiments expressed in his works. It is neatly and closely written, covering three folio pages, but the ink is now much faded, and where the letter was folded the writing is barely decipherable. It is addressed on the backside:—

“To theyr lovinge cosen  
Willm Hamerton at  
London; this be delyvered.”

It evidently came at length into hostile hands, for at the head of the first page, in a contemporary hand, but in blacker ink, this couplet is written:—

“This Brownist’s letter, alle vile and vayne  
I doe protest I’le ne’re read o’er againe.”

My reason for putting this letter later than the date usually assigned to it is because it contains some passages which also appear in Smith’s “Character of the Beast,” published in 1609. Compare the following sentences:—

“I deny that ever the English nation or anyone of our predecessors were of the faith of Christ, shew it if you can, but we came of a Pagan race till Rome the mother came and put upon us her false baptisme . . . and our case is simply Paganish.”—*Character of the Beast*, 1609, p. 64.

“We confidently deny that ever the English nation or anyone of our predecessors, were of the faith of Christ, or at any time believed visibly in a true constituted church, but were come of the race of the Pagans till Rome the mother came and put upon us her false baptisme worship and ministry and so our case is simply

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

"For the Holy Ghost . . . in heavenly wisdom for our instruction calleth persons apostating from the true constitution of the Church, Babylonians, Egyptians, Sodomites, Gentils, thereby teaching us he esteemeth no otherwise of their Church or baptisme than of the Synagogues of Babylon, than of the washings of Egypt, than of the worship of Sodom and of the Pagans."—*Ibid.*, p. 63.

"Can anything be true in a false Church but the Scriptures and the truthes conteyned therein?"—*Ibid.*, p. 58.

Paganish. And the Holy Ghost in the Scriptures compareth us to the worst kind of Pagans calling persons apostating from the true constitution of the Church Babylonians, Egyptians, Sodomites, &c., teaching us the Church of England, that He esteemeth no otherwise of the Church or baptisme than of the Sinagogue of Babilon, than of the washings of Egypt, than of the worship of Sodom. Your Church of England therefore being of antichrists constitution is a false church and can there be anything true in a false church but only the Scriptures and the truthes therein conteyned?"—Hugh Bromehead's letter, *Harl. MS.*, 360, fol. 71.

The passage quoted is consecutive in Bromehead's letter, but it will be seen that he has lifted sentences out of their connection from Smith's book and pieced them together. Bromehead is more interesting when he is more original. The concluding paragraphs of his letter are valuable because of their personal note and the graphic picture they give of the order of service followed in Smith's Church:—

"Beloved cousin," say the Bromeheads, "concerning your request of a book of our present settled government, there is none extant though there be divers books written by our pastor touching the matters in controversy between the Church of England and us, and touching the differences between us and the other churches here.

"The order of the worship and government of our church is:—  
I. We begin with a prayer, after read some one or two chapters

## Order of Service in Smith's Church

of the Bible ; give the sense thereof and confer upon the same ; that done, we lay aside our books and after a solemn prayer made by the first speaker he propoundeth some text out of the scripture and prophesieth out of the same by the space of one hour or three quarters of an hour. After him standeth up a second speaker and prophesieth out of the said text the like time and space, sometimes more, sometimes less. After him, the third, the fourth, the fifth, &c., as the time will give leave. Then the first speaker concludeth with prayer as he began with prayer, with an exhortation to contribution to the poor, which collection being made is also concluded with prayer. This morning exercise begins at eight of the clock and continueth unto twelve of the clock. The like course of exercise is observed in the afternoon from two of the clock unto five or six of the clock. Last of all the execution of the government of the Church is handled.

“ Loving cousin, I have by this bearer sent unto you a book of the making of Mr. Smith, our pastor. I wish you diligently to peruse and seriously with judgment to examine the same, and if you request any more of this or any other argument written by him either for yourself or for your friends to signify the same unto us by your letters, and we will (the Lord willing) procure the same so that you find a faithful messenger to whom we may safely commit the carriage thereof, for we have heretofore sent divers books into England and they have perished through the unfaithes of the carrier and came not into the hands of the parties unto whom they were sent.

“ Yours in the Lord at all times to use,

“ HUGHE AND ANNE BROMEHEAD.”

Some twenty-three years later we have an equally graphic account of a service in the Church of the Pilgrim Fathers at Plymouth, New England, and it is no extravagant claim to say that the order of service then followed shows signs of direct dependence upon the form and order evolved in the Church of John Smith. The occasion was a visit of Governor John Winthrop and the Rev. John Wilson, pastor of Boston, with others, to the colony of Plymouth. They went on foot, and

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

were cordially met by "the Governor of Plymouth, Mr. William Bradford, a very discreet grave man with Mr. Brewster, the elder."

"On the Lord's Day there was a sacrament which they did partake in; and in the afternoon Mr. Roger Williams, according to their custom, propounded a question to which the pastor, Mr. [Ralph] Smith spoke briefly, then Mr. [Roger] Williams prophesied, and afterwards the Governor of Plymouth spoke to the question after him the elder, then some two or three more of the congregation. Then the elder desired the Governor of Massachusetts and Mr. Wilson to speak to it, which they did. When this was ended the deacon, Mr. Fuller, put the congregation in mind of their duty of contribution, upon which the Governor and all the rest went down to the deacon's seat, and put into the bag and then returned." <sup>1</sup>

Bromehead's letter also gives evidence that he was well acquainted with some of the earlier Separatist literature. It has not been noticed that he embodies in his letter the whole of the remarkable little tract, probably issued as early as 1589, entitled "A Brief Summe of the causes of our separation and of our purposes in practice." The declaration of Separatist principles given in that brief tract was withstood by the Puritan George Gifford, of Malden, and defended by Henry Barrowe. It had been reprinted in 1605, probably at Amsterdam, at the instance of Francis Johnson, and would be readily accessible in the Separatist circles in that city. Bromehead introduces it in this way:—

"Concerning the 4 pte of your letter, wherein you seem to desire to know wherein your church might be reformed, although I know not herein where to begin or where to end, the corruptions thereof be so many and so infinite, yet in some measure, to satisfy

<sup>1</sup> *Coll. Mass. Hist. Soc.*, vol. x., p. 2.



## Earliest Separatist Manifesto

your requests I will give you a view and taste of them, but before, I will give you a brief sume<sup>1</sup> of the causes of our separation and of our purposes in practice."

Bromehead then transcribes almost word for word the entire leaflet which bore that title. It provided a terse summary of the Separatist position ready to his hand and had already done good service among the London Separatists.

<sup>1</sup> Hunter read this word "view," otherwise he would probably have recognised this title. The MS. reads "sume." The tract itself has been reprinted as *The Earliest Separatist Manifesto*, by Dr. Powicke; see his *Henry Barrow*, Appendix ii., 1900.

### NOTE A

Since this chapter was drafted I have found some contemporary references to Hugh Bromehead as "*curate of North Wheatley*." The earliest is in the will, dated October 26, 1571, of George Lane, parson of St. Helen's, South Wheatley, a church now in ruins. Bromehead must have been about sixty years of age when he fled to Amsterdam. Cf. the *Register Book of Southwell Peculiar*, Vol. A., ff. 71, 89, in Nottingham Probate Registry.

## NOTE B

We may compare Bromehead's account of the order of service in Smith's Church with an account given a few years later by Richard Clifton of the order followed in the Church to which he and Johnson ministered:—

“(1) Prayer and giving of thanks by the pastor or teacher.

“(2) The Scriptures are read, two or three chapters, as time serves, with a brief explanation of their meaning.

“(3) The pastor or teacher then takes some passage of scripture and expounds and enforces it.

“(4) The sacraments are administered.

“(5) Some of the Psalms of David are sung by the whole congregation, both before and after the exercise of the Word.

“(6) Collection is then made, as each one is able, for the support of the officers and the poor.<sup>1</sup>

Though Bromehead made no mention of the sacraments, we know from other sources that it was the custom in Smith's Church to hold the commemorative service<sup>1</sup> of the Lord's Supper on each Sunday. The absence of any reference to singing in Bromehead's account and the special notice given to it by Clifton is significant. In Smith's Church and in the General Baptist Churches that sprang from it, “conjoint singing” was regarded as a “carnal formality” down to comparatively recent times. If any member had a psalm or hymn of joy he was at liberty to sing it, but congregational singing was not countenanced. But in Johnson's Church, largely owing to Ainsworth's influence, psalm singing by the whole congregation came into vogue. The psalms in an “uncouth and strange translation” were lined out for the congregation to sing. Lawne in his “Prophane Schism of the Brownists,” 1612, makes fun of this practice. The version published by Ainsworth in 1612, in his “Book of Psalms, Englished both in prose and metre,” is not attractive in form, but we owe him a debt of gratitude for helping to retain conjoint singing and melodious harmony as a recognised feature in the public worship of the Congregational Churches.

<sup>1</sup> Clyfton's *Advertisement, etc.*, 1612. [Quoted in Robinson's *Works*, iii., p. 485.]

## CHAPTER XII

### JOHN SMITH AND THE MENNONITES — THE DOCTRINE OF INCARNATION — THE QUESTION OF "SUCCESSION"—DIVISION BETWEEN HELWYS AND SMITH

THE advance of John Smith to the conviction that the Church was formed by baptism, and not by a covenant, and that baptism was only to be administered to adults on repentance and profession of faith, attracted attention outside the little circle of English refugees at Amsterdam. It brought him into closer touch with the Dutch Mennonites. Under their influence there was a gracious development in his character. He now began to pass out of the atmosphere of controversy, and attained a large measure of that wisdom from above which is "peaceable, gentle, easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits." Side by side with this development there went on a gradual change in his doctrinal opinions, leading to his abandonment of the doctrines of predestination and election. From a Calvinist he became an Arminian. He eventually adopted views concerning the person and work of Jesus, and the respective values of the two Testaments, which specially marked certain sections of Mennonites and Anabaptists.

But it is the change in the tone and temper of his writing rather than any change in doctrine that arrests

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

our attention to-day. The spirit of the man seems altered. He writes as one who has risen above the dust of religious contention into a clearer and serener air. He has at last laid hold upon the things that really matter. It is the spiritual apprehension of the Christian faith and gospel that is of importance, and not so much its external form. Thus the last writings of Smith breathe an unusual spirit of tolerance. The fact that he began to practise physic for a livelihood probably helped to widen his outlook. He found his environment at Amsterdam mentally stimulating, and moved on speedily in opinion at the beckoning of truth.

Let us endeavour to trace the later stages in his religious development. In the closing months of the year 1609 he and his Church appear to have given careful consideration to some of the points in controversy between the Calvinists and Arminians. The extent of the redemptive work of Christ and the freedom of man's will were among the questions discussed. The upshot was that they arrived at conclusions on these points diverging from the position taken up in the Anglican Articles of Religion, and approaching the Arminian standpoint. Clifton charges Smith with being "tainted with the errors of general redemption and free wil." "Else why," he exclaims, "hath he given forth these Positions":

"1. Christ's redemption stretcheth to all men.

"2. Man hath not lost the faculty of willing any good thing that is shewed him,  
"and withal added thereunto his reasons in defence thereof." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Clifton's answer to "Mr. Smythe's Epistle to the Reader" in *The Plea for Infants*, 1610

## The Redemptive Work of Christ

It is important to notice that Smith carried his company with him thus far in his doctrinal development, and it is here that we have coming into clear view, in an organised religious society of Englishmen, those religious opinions which specially marked the English General Baptists. Thomas Helwys, John Murton, and the rest, under Smith's guidance, after full discussion of the matter in their Church meetings, definitely broke away from Calvinism. They might severally present the doctrines of general redemption and free will with varying accent and emphasis, but they all left behind the doctrines of reprobation and election as interpreted by High Calvinists.

But on other questions which Smith proceeded to consider his Church broke to pieces. There were minor points of difference, but the outstanding questions which led to divisions in his company were concerned with their own act of assuming baptism for themselves and the manner of Christ's Incarnation. The latter subject aroused an extraordinary amount of interest among the Anabaptists. On the Continent Melchior Hofmann and his disciples taught that Jesus did not assume his flesh of the Virgin, but came with a celestial body. His views on this subject were widely adopted by the Mennonites. In England we have a similar view expressed with striking force by Joan Bocher, who suffered at the stake, May 2, 1550, for maintaining that Christ took nothing of the Virgin, but passed through her as a conduit pipe. This view re-appeared sporadically in England from time to time down to the days of Matthew Caffyn (1628—1714) and William Jeffrey, who publicly professed and preached it amongst

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

the General Baptists of London, Kent, and Sussex. It was an opinion closely bound up with an exalted view of Christ's redemptive work, and sprang from the feeling that he could have been under no obligation to human kind for any part of his nature. It was a belief which grew out of the same kind of sentiment which gave rise to the doctrine of the Virgin birth. It was one of the fantastic flowers which blossomed on the tree of Christian mysticism. Though this view arose from a desire to glorify the person of Jesus and remove him far from man's grossness and frailty, yet it was usually held in conjunction with a belief in the supremacy of God the Father. The term "Trinity" was rejected as unscriptural in the circles where this opinion prevailed. It was on account of this belief that the Mennonites were charged with denying the humanity of Christ.

Now, when John Smith renounced the baptism of infants and maintained the doctrine of adult baptism it was almost inevitable that he would be classed by the man in the street with the Anabaptists, and charged with holding their doctrinal opinions. That is what actually happened, and in the early part of 1609 we find him writing with vehemence: "We disclayme the errors commonly but most slaunderously imputed vnto vs."<sup>1</sup> He took pains at the same time to set out his view "concerning the flesh of Christ" to remove misunderstanding.

"We do believe," he says, "that Christ is the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and of David according to the prophecies of the Scriptures, and that he is the Son of Mary his Mother, made of her substance, the Holy

<sup>1</sup> *Character of the Beast*, Epistle to Reader, p. v.



## The Incarnation of Christ

Ghost overshadowing her. So have other children their bodily substance from their parents. Also that Christ is one person in two distinct natures—the Godhead and manhood, and we detest the contrary errors.”<sup>1</sup>

That sounds like orthodox doctrine. But the question was now to the front for discussion in Smith’s Church. If they had arrived at a conclusion about baptism similar to that which the Mennonites had reached, was it not possible that a careful examination of other questions in the light of the New Testament would show that the Mennonites were right on those also? How did matters stand with regard to the doctrine of the Incarnation of our Lord? When Smith came to look into this question he modified his opinion and drew more closely to the Mennonites. Some in his company went farther and faster in the heretical direction upon this particular point than he did, while others held firmly to their old faith. This was made a ground of separation in his company. As early as 1610 Clifton was able to write :—

“Touching the error of the Incarnation of Christ, which also Mr. Smyth desireth [in his book of 1609] may not be imputed unto them; it is well known that many of their company holding that error about the Incarnation are separated from the rest. And Mr. Smyth himself (as some among them have reported) maketh a question about the first matter of Christ’s human nature, as if it were not a point of faith to believe it was of the Virgin, though it be to be believed that the second matter was nourished in her womb.”<sup>2</sup>

That was the impression which Smith’s teaching on this point made upon Thomas Helwys, who now broke with

<sup>1</sup> *Character of the Beast*, Epistle to Reader, 1609.

<sup>2</sup> Clifton’s *The Plea*, 1610. Answer to “Smythe’s Epistle to the Reader.”

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

his old leader. Helwys, writing in 1611, set down some of the errors into which he thought his pastor had fallen. He put the charge against Smith in this way:—

“That CHRIST concerning the first matter of his Flesh, he affirmed, that all the Scriptures would not prove that he had it of the virgine Marie, but his second matter which he said was his nourishment that the Scriptures proved he had of Marie, thus making CHRIST to have two matters of his Flesh.”<sup>1</sup>

Happily we have Smith's own conclusion upon the matter, which seems reasonable enough as he set it down. He is answering the charge just given:—

“I affirmed concerning Christ that his second Flesh, that is his nourishment, he had from his mother, and that the Scriptures are plain for it; but concerning the first matter of Christ's Flesh whence it was, I said thus much: That, although I yield it to be a truth in nature that he had it of his mother Mary, yet I dare not make it such an article of faith as that if any man will not consent unto it I shall therefore refuse brotherhood with him: and that the Scriptures do not lead us (as far as I conceive) to the searching of that point, whereof Christ's natural flesh was made; but that we should search into Christ's spiritual flesh to be made flesh of that his flesh and bone of his bone in the communion and fellowship of the same spirit.”<sup>2</sup>

In accordance with that view we have a more becoming reticence in the “Confession of Faith,” one of the last works of Smith, which was published by the remainder of his company after his death. There he says, “the word became flesh wonderfully by the power of God in the womb of the Virgin Mary.”<sup>3</sup>

A considerable diversity of opinion continued amongst

<sup>1</sup> *A Declaration of Faith*, 1611. Sig. B.

<sup>2</sup> Last book of John Smith, 1612.

<sup>3</sup> In proposition 31, *Confession of Faith*, but the form here given is simpler than the original draft as found in MS. in the archives of the Mennonite Church at Amsterdam. See Evans, *Baptists*, i., 261.

## Opinion on the Person of Christ

the English Anabaptists about the manner of Christ's Incarnation. This topic exercised a singular fascination over many minds. Curious speculations as to how Christ could have been an adequate sacrifice for the sinful world if he derived his nature from fallen humanity were eagerly followed up. Many held a Sabellian view of the Deity, "that there is but one single God revealed under three distinct names—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."<sup>1</sup> There was a disposition amongst the early Baptists to tolerate differences of opinion on these abstruse questions, according to the example of Smith in his last days. The echoes of the controversy on this subject were heard amongst the older section of English Baptists right down to modern times. I have not been able to determine the number of those who separated from Smith and Helwys on the ground of difference of belief about the Incarnation. It was only a small secession, and probably not permanent. I see no reason why those who held heretical views on this point should not have rejoined Smith when he himself expressed a willingness to have fellowship with those who did not see eye to eye on this matter, but were at the same time sincere and blameless in life.

The second question which caused a division in Smith's Church was closely connected with his change of view with regard to his action in baptizing himself and his company of fellow believers. At the time he did this he thought the act was justified, for he *then* knew of no "true Church" to which they might apply for baptism. But a closer acquaintance with the

<sup>1</sup> Letter of Elias Tookey to Hans de Rys, etc., May, 1624. Evans, *Baptists*, ii., p. 38.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

Mennonite Church convinced him that here was a true Church already in being. The storm of criticism that his act of self-baptism aroused made him waver, and forced upon his attention some consequences which had not occurred to him before. As there was a true Church in existence at the time when he arrived at a conviction of the truth, Smith concluded that he and his company had acted "disorderly" in assuming baptism for themselves. The right course for them to have taken would have been to seek baptism from those who had already recovered that ordinance. And now that they had found a true Church they ought to retrace their steps, and for the sake of order enter into fellowship with this new-found Church and receive the ordinances at the hands of her "elders."

This was the point in which Helwys strongly disagreed with Smith, and the main ground upon which he separated from him and renounced him. Helwys was suspicious of any advances towards the Dutch. He felt that he and his friends had just recovered the truth, and set themselves in true Church order by assuming baptism, and that it was folly on the part of his old leader to topple the whole edifice over again. They had attained a position in which he for one was content to stay. It would endanger their liberty and bring them again under a yoke of bondage if they had to seek baptism and ordination at the hands of outsiders. He thought the New Testament gave them ample warrant for the course they had taken in baptizing themselves. Was there not the example of John the Baptist? Was there not the general command to all Christ's followers to make disciples and baptize them? The Mennonites

## Validity of Smith's Baptism

themselves had no certain knowledge as to who amongst their fathers revived the practice of adult baptism. Why was not the baptism revived amongst this company of honest Englishmen as valid as that assumed by Swiss and Flemish and Frisian Anabaptists? There was point in this argument of Helwys, but in spite of his vehement protest John Smith and the majority of his company fell more and more under the influence of the Dutch Mennonites, and at length many of them renounced the baptism they had assumed for themselves and applied for admission to the new Frisian Mennonite Church at Amsterdam under the pastoral care of Hans de Ries and Reynier Wybrantson. Of these two leaders Helwys says, "You came publicly amongst us and advanced your error of Succession and order . . . and have destroyed the faith of manie."<sup>1</sup> He also refers to instruction that they gave privately. This instruction was given with effect, for Helwys now set down amongst the errors of Smith his new opinion :—

"That the Church and Ministry must come by Succession, contrary to his former profession in words and writing. And *that* by a supposed succession he cannot shew from whom nor when nor where."<sup>2</sup>

Helwys indeed felt so strongly upon this point that he and a small handful who adhered to him, still regarding themselves as a true and rightly constituted Church, formally "cast out" Smith and his associates as those who had departed from the truth. Though they were so few and weak, Helwys and his friends could rightly regard themselves as representing the Church

<sup>1</sup> *Advertisement to the New Fryesers*, p. i., 1611.

<sup>2</sup> *Declaration of Faith*. Sig. B 2, 1611.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

that Smith had set up, for Smith and his companions had voluntarily renounced their standing and membership in that society. Clifton refers to these unhappy divisions when he says :—

“Mr. Smyth and divers with him are excommunicate for holding (as it is reported by some that were of them) that their new washed companie is no true Church, and that there cannot be in a Church the administration of baptism and other ordinances of Christ without officers, contrarie to his former judgment practice and writings.”<sup>1</sup>

To such a low condition had this first English Church of Baptized Believers been reduced in 1610 that Clifton could write :—

“Of this new baptised communion there are remayning, as it is reported, not above 10 persons all the rest are runne into further errors.”<sup>2</sup>

Yet this little Church had such vitality that it was destined to have many years of life and exert a wide influence in the homeland. Thus by the spring of the year 1610 there came to be three groups of English Anabaptists in Amsterdam. The largest was made up of those who adhered to Smith, between forty and fifty in number, who were seeking affiliation with the Mennonites ; next there were those who had separated on the ground of their special belief about the Incarnation, and, lastly, there was the group under the leadership of Thomas Helwys and John Murton, who manfully maintained the right of any body of people aroused to the Christian life both to baptize and to ordain ministers and officers for themselves. There were also religious

<sup>1</sup> Clifton's *Plea*, 1610, Epistle to Reader.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, margin.



## Groups of English Anabaptists

individualists of Anabaptist leanings like Mark Leonard Busher and a few seekers, but these had no special following. The news of the division in John Smith's Church quickly became known in England. It is surprising to see how closely the religious movements among the refugees in Holland were followed both by friends and enemies at home. In "The Description of the Church of Christ," issued in London in this very year of 1610, the author says :—

"For you Master Smith and your company here is news come to England already that you are divided, and you know what must come to a divided kingdom and a house against itself."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Description of Church of Christ*, by I. H., 1610, p. 94.

## CHAPTER XIII

### NEGOTIATIONS FOR ADMISSION TO THE MENNONITE CHURCH

THE negotiations on the part of John Smith and his friends for admission to membership in the Mennonite Church were prolonged far beyond their expectation. The Dutch acted with extraordinary deliberation. No doubt there were several in their Amsterdam Church who were ready to make the way easy for the admission of the English, but all were not of this mind. Objections had to be met. Questions as to faith and practice had to be considered. Kindred Churches had to be consulted. The matter began to drag. The course which these proceedings took is illustrated by a remarkable series of documents preserved in the archives of the Mennonite Church at Amsterdam, copies of which were supplied by Professor Müller to Dr. B. Evans, and printed by him in his history of the early English Baptists. There is at the outset the undated acknowledgement in Latin of their error in baptizing themselves in which they express their desire to join the true Church.

“The names of the English who acknowledge this their error and repent of it, viz., that they took in hand to baptize themselves contrary to the order laid down by Christ, and who now desire to come hence [*i.e.*, from the state of error] to the true Church of Christ as speedily as it can be done.

# Negotiations with the Mennonites

## Names of Men

Hugo Bromehead  
Jarvase Nevill  
John Smyth  
Thomas Canadyne  
Edward Hawkins  
John Hardie  
Thomas Pygott  
Francis Pygott  
Robert Staveley  
Alexander Fleminge  
Alexander Hodgkins  
John Grindal  
Solomon Thomson  
Samuel Halton  
Thomas Dolphin

## Names of Women

Ann Bromehead  
Jane Southworth  
Mary Smyth  
Joan Halton  
Alis Arnfield  
Isabell Thomson  
Margaret Staveley  
Mary Grindal  
Mother Pygott  
Alis Pygott  
Margaret Pygott  
Betteris Dickinson  
Mary Dickinson  
Ellyn Paynter  
Alis Parsons  
Joane Briggs  
Jane Organ

“We unanimously desire this resolution of ours to be signified to the Church.”

The Mennonite Church was not a confessional Church and had no authoritative standard of belief, but this application on the part of Smith and his friends led to the drawing up of a Confession of Faith which was for many years accepted as a general statement of the opinions prevalent among the Mennonites. There would be a desire on both sides to know one another's religious views. It was a period in which the points in dispute between Calvinists and Arminians were closely discussed, and in this very year of 1610 the Arminian creed was formulated in the celebrated Five Articles presented as a “Remonstrance” to the representatives of Holland and West Friesland. The framing of confessions of faith was the fashion of the time. John

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

Smith drew up a terse statement in Latin<sup>1</sup> setting forth his belief in twenty articles. I take this as his own personal confession, as it is signed by him alone. The pastors or elders of the Waterlander Mennonite Church, Hans de Ries and Lubbert Gerrits, for their part drew up a far more elaborate statement of faith, extending to thirty-eight articles, in order to show the English Anabaptists their doctrinal position, and with a view to securing the assent of Smith and his friends. A manuscript copy in the archives of the Mennonite College at Amsterdam was subscribed in the following general terms by forty-two English men and women headed by John Smyth and Hugh Bromehead: "We subscribe to the truth of these articles, desiring further information." The latter clause is characteristic of the members of Smith's Church. Even now, when convinced they had found a true Church, they were not prepared to bind themselves down to finality.

I place the signing of this Confession at a later date than has hitherto been given. My reason for this is because the name of Dorothy Thomson is found among the signatures. Now, the marriage of Solomon Thomson to Dorothy Struth is recorded as taking place at Amsterdam on July 14, 1612. As John Smith, who died in August, 1612, appears among the signatories, it is clear that the document must have been signed by himself and his followers at some time during the last few weeks of his life, between July 14 and the end of August, assuming that all the signatures were appended at the same time. This action was probably prompted by a desire to facilitate a speedy union with the

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix to this chapter.

## A Short Confession of Faith

Mennonites in view of the failing health of Smith. We must not take this Mennonite Confession then as exactly reflecting the opinion of these people. The account of Smith's opinions given by Robert Barclay<sup>1</sup> is vitiated by his acceptance of this "Short Confession" as an accurate statement of Smith's religious convictions.

The care with which the Dutch proceeded is shown by the correspondence they had with neighbouring Churches on the subject. The ministers of the Mennonite Church examined the English about their doctrine of salvation, the government of the Church, and the foundation and form of their baptism. Finding the English in agreement with themselves on these points, the ministers reported upon the matter in due course to the "brethren" or general body of church members. "After some weeks" a joint meeting of Dutch and English was held, and the latter were severally asked "to relate what was given in their hearts by God," when it was found that, "only a few excepted," they agreed with the Mennonites. The way would then seem to have been clear for admitting these applicants to church fellowship. There were, however, two considerations which made the Mennonites hesitate.

The first was, that the little group of English folk under Thomas Helwys and John Murton strongly urged the Dutch to be careful, and protested that they were wrong in their doctrine of "Succession" and in their contention that "elders" must be ordained by elders. A letter right from the heart of this controversy has been preserved. It was addressed to the Dutch brethren, and as it gives, in the impetuous style of

<sup>1</sup> *Inner Life of Religious Societies of the Commonwealth*, 2nd ed., 1877, p. 113.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

Helwys, a vindication of the position assumed by the English Baptists, it is worth while setting it out in full :—

*“Beloved in the Lord,* Your approved care, diligence and faithfulness in the advancement of God’s holy truth, being the good experience (to God be given the glory) well known unto us, makes us that we can do no less than, with our best hopes, hope that through the grace of God (his word and Spirit directing you) we shall find you so still. And therefore we are with much gladness and willingness stirred up to write to you, praying you, as you love the Lord and his truth, that you will take wise counsel and that from God’s Word how you deal in this cause betwixt us and those who are justly for their sins cast out from us. And the whole cause in question being Succession (for so it is in deed and in truth), consider, we beseech you how it is Antichrist’s chief hold, and that it is Jewish and ceremonial, an ordinance of the Old Testament, but not of the New. Furthermore, let it be well considered that this Succession, which is founded upon neither the times, person, nor place, can[not] be proved to any man’s conscience and so, herein, we should ground our faith we cannot tell upon whom nor when nor where. We beseech you consider how can we of faith forsake the evident light of God’s truth to walk in such darkness ?

*“And this is our warrant by the Word of truth.* First, from baptism. John Baptist being unbaptized preached the baptism of repentance and they that believed and confessed their sins he baptized. And whosoever shall now be stirred up by the same Spirit to preach the same Word, and men thereby being converted, may, according to John his example, wash them with water and who can forbid ? And we pray, that we may speak freely herein, how dare any man or men challenge unto themselves a pre-eminence herein, as though the Spirit of God was only in their hearts and the Word of God now only to be fetched at their mouths and the ordinances of God only to be had from their hands—except they were apostles ? Hath the Lord thus restrained his Spirit, his Word and Ordinances as to make particular men lords over them or the keepers of them ? God forbid ! This is contrary to the liberty of the Gospel, which is free for all men at all times and in all places : yea so our Saviour Christ doth testify—wheresoever, whosoever and whensoever two or three are gathered together



## Letter of Helwys and his Friends

in his name there is he in the midst of them. And thus much in all Christian love we do advertize you, that this ground of truth is and will be maintained against all the world and that by the great adversaries of our faith in divers other main points [the Separatists under Robinson and other Brownists are probably meant] who will be glad to have such an advantage against you if you shall publish or practise any things against this ground in the xviii. of Matthew, and the professors of Christ shall sustain much reproach by it; and therefore we earnestly entreat you, even by the love of Christ that is in you, that you will be well advised what you do in these things.

“And now for the other question—that elders must ordain elders. If this be a true perpetual rule, then from whom is your eldership come? And if one church might once ordain then why not all churches always? Oh, that we might be thought worthy to be answered in these things or that the poor advice of so few, so simple and so weak might prevail with you to cause you to look circumspectly to your ways in these things! The Lord, that knoweth all hearts knoweth ours towards you herein, that we do desire that there may be found no way of error in you; but that you and we might walk uprightly in the ways of God, casting utterly away all the traditions of men, and this we are persuaded is your unfeigned desire also. Now fulfil our persuasion herein and try your standing in these points and respect not how many hold these things with you but respect from what grounds of truth you hold them.

“Thus beseeching the Lord to persuade your hearts that your hands may not be against his truth and against us, the Lord’s unworthy witnesses, we take leave commending you to the gracious protection of the Almighty and to the blessed direction of his Word and Spirit, beseeching the Lord to do by you according to the great love and kindness that you have shown unto us. Grace and peace be with you. Amen. Your brethren in Christ,

“AMSTERDAM

*this 12th of March 1610.”*

THO. HELWYS.

WILLIAM PIGGOTT.

THOS. SEAMER.

JOHN MURTON.”

“P. S.—We have written to you in our own tongue because we are not able to express our minds in any other and seeing you have an interpreter. And we have been much grieved since our

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

last conference with you, because we dishonoured the truth of God much for want of speech in that we were not able to utter that poor measure of knowledge which God of his grace hath given us."

It does not appear that the leaders of the Amsterdam Mennonites took much notice of this protest. Indeed, in addressing Hans de Ries and Reynier Wybrantson and their congregations in 1611, Helwys was constrained to say :—

"We<sup>1</sup> have written privately to the whole congregation you are of to prevent you in that evil [*i.e.*, the evil of making Smith's people one with them], we have written particularly unto you H. de R., but all is in vaine in that you esteeme the truth wee professe and us herein as vaine."

But the opposition of Helwys and his company would cause the Dutch elders to move cautiously.

The second consideration that led to delay was connected with the manner of Smith's baptism. It was a curious point. Smith's own baptism of himself was admittedly irregular, but did that invalidate the baptism which he had administered to the others? If his company was to be admitted to the Mennonite Church were the several members to be rebaptized once more? It was a knotty problem. It may seem trivial to us, but it was all terribly serious to them. The Amsterdam ministers resolved not to go on in the matter without first consulting the ministers of neighbouring and kindred Churches. Accordingly, a letter explaining the circumstances was addressed by Lubbert Gerrits to the ministers of the Mennonite Church at Leeuwarden. He says: "Our opinion and our best idea about this affair is

<sup>1</sup> Helwys, *An Advertisement etc.*, Prefatory Epistle.

## Delay in Union—Dutch Caution

that these English without being baptized again must be accepted." All the ministers and "by far the greatest part of the congregation" at Amsterdam were of this opinion. If they were mistaken in this view they were quite ready to be corrected :—

"We are most willing to be instructed by any one if we err and lack the truth in this affair. Be good enough to teach the English also from the Word of God if it be needful that they should be baptized again, for they declare that they have no objection to be baptized again, *if you can prove by reason and the Word of God* that their baptism is of less value than that of the Flemings, the Frisians, and other baptizers."

The point was that members of all these sections of Anabaptists, as well as those formerly identified with the extravagant Münster party and the Amsterdam naked-walkers had been accepted as members by the Mennonites without being rebaptized. Surely the baptism of this godfearing company of English people was of equal—nay, of greater value than that bestowed by such extreme Anabaptist Churches. Gerritts was careful to explain that it was not a question about Smith's own act of baptizing himself, but of the position of the rank and file of his Church.

"We ourselves," he says, "do distinguish the act of baptizing by which he has baptized himself, that is quite a different affair—at present the other baptism is the question—do notice this."

Gerritts gives us incidentally a testimony to the capacity of Smith and his friends: "They are," he says, "very intelligent people, who will not be blinded at all by discourses without good reason," and he confesses that to be one reason why he had not the heart to

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

question the validity of their baptism, or to demand their rebaptism before admission to his Church.

The ministers in Leeuwarden were asked to attend a conference in Amsterdam to be held on May 23, *stilo novo*, 1610, for the purpose of deciding upon the application made by Smith's associates. This they did not find it convenient to do, and they sent a letter in good time (May 15, *stilo novo*) to say they should not attend. They regarded the proposed union with the English as "a very critical thing," and would not pronounce a definite opinion upon it before consulting their congregations. They desired fuller information. Quite naturally they said they would not be inclined to consent before they had received from the Amsterdam elders "The short account of the chief articles of the doctrine and customs of their congregations,"<sup>1</sup> which Hans de Ries and Lubbert Gerrits had set out for the English in writing. They wanted an opportunity for examining these articles with their congregations. Thus the matter was delayed.

Smith and his friends pressed for an answer to their request for admission to Church fellowship. When questioned about it the Amsterdam Mennonites "scarcely knew what to answer that this affair is put off such a long time." Accordingly they wrote another letter to their "dear brethren and fellow servants in the Gospel of the Lord yonder in Friesland," dated July 16, 1610, *stilo novo*. They asked for a reply within a fortnight to two questions:—

<sup>1</sup> I think we have here a reference to the actual title given to this Confession by its author. Schyn gives a Latin translation entitled *Praecipuorum Christianae fidei Articulorum brevis Confessio adornata a Joanne Risio et Lubberto Gerardo*. See his *Historia Mennonitarum*, 1729, pp. 172—220.

## Will the Dutch Admit the English

“Firstly. What there may be in the Confession (which, according to your desire, is sent to you, as you wished to examine it with your congregations and compare it with the Word of God) that ought to be rejected or improved ?

“Secondly. What according to your opinion and according to the Word of God must be thought of their being baptized ?”

If they heard nothing within the fortnight they would take it that the matter was left in their hands to deal with as they thought best.

The brethren at Leeuwarden sent a reply on July 28, 1610, *stilo novo*, gently remonstrating against the undue haste of the Amsterdam brethren ! It was an affair quite new and unheard of before, and ought to be laid before all the Mennonite Churches in Prussia, Germany and elsewhere. They ought first to bend their energies upon the work of establishing peace and concord between the different sections of Mennonites. “Do not leave so easily the old friends by choosing new ones who, perhaps will not be so good.” As to the specific requests, they had not had time to thoroughly examine the “Confession,” but there was the less need for their particular opinion on the thirty-eight articles of the creed, since it was now published in print, and a general judgment upon it might be expected from the world. And as to their opinion about the validity of the baptism assumed by these Englishmen—they were not prepared to say much about it, except that they knew of no such use, custom or ordinance from Holy Scripture. If their Amsterdam brethren admitted these English people, it would be upon their own responsibility, but they ought at any rate to inform all the kindred Churches about the matter.

In the face of this unfavourable reply the question of the admission of the English was hung up indefinitely.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

John Smith and his friends were left in a curious position. They had renounced their former Church order and voluntarily dissolved their Church. From the friendly advances of prominent Amsterdam Mennonites they had expected to be speedily admitted to Church fellowship with them. Now the way was barred for the time being. They might attend the services of the Mennonites as individuals. They might continue to hold meetings among themselves, but according to their own principles, they would have no Church power, and no right to participate in Church ordinances until they were received into Church fellowship, or until they had once again constituted themselves in Church order.

Thomas Helwys was well aware of the course of events amongst his old friends. It was a grief to him that they frequented the services and meetings of the Mennonites. He pointed out to the Dutch elders that Smith was acquainted with the apostolic exhortation to worship and pray and sing in language that was intelligible. Smith knew that those who failed to understand could not truly say "Amen," and were in the position of barbarians to him who was leading the worship. Yet, says Helwys :—

"This man notwithstanding when he had himself but a little understanding of your language, and the rest of his confederacy—when some of them had not any understanding to be spoken of, and divers none at all, neither yet have—have and do come to worship with you, being barbarians unto you, and say 'Amen' (else what do they there), not knowing whether you bless or curse. . . . And doth not the Apostle teach that it is better to have five words in the Church or Congregation with understanding than ten thousand words in a strange tongue, but these men, with a sort of women that are void of understanding, had rather hear in your Church or congregation five words without any under-



## English attend the Dutch Services

standing than ten thousand with understanding in a congregation or Church gathered together by the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ and baptized into his name upon the confession of their faith and sins. This they knew was *our* beginning, but *your* beginning they know not, neither can know. And if you had any other beginning it is not according to God's Word. But that is all one to them; they have not regarded how you began in the *faith* nor how you stand in the faith, which (if they had not forsaken all religion) they would have had regard of. But religion was not, nor is not, their mark that they aimed at, as you may easily discern by these their wilful blind courses, whereinto you have led them by your blind Succession. . . . For this people, who have run after your inventions, . . . whose knowledge, gifts and graces were great and who walked, and professed to walk, strictly by the rules of Christ and under his yoke, now are they Belial, walking by no rule of Christ, not being under his yoke, having disclaimed themselves for [from] having any power to [in] the holy things, and have given all to you, all their religion being only to come and gaze at you who speak to them in a strange tongue. . . . And in that they are thus left in confusion not knowing nor caring whither to go, we have cause to magnify the name of God in that He hath confounded them in their ways that would have confounded His way of truth. And we have cause to bless God that hath prevented you and kept you from making them to be one with you, whereby you had strengthened them in their evil and enlarged your own sin exceedingly."<sup>1</sup>

It is clear from this that Smith and his adherents continued to frequent the services of the Mennonites, although they were debarred, as yet, from the privileges of full church membership. They also continued to hold meetings by themselves in which their mother tongue was used in preaching, praise and prayer. Their usual place of meeting was in the building known as "the Cake House of Jan Munter"<sup>2</sup> a wealthy and generous-hearted member of the Waterlander Mennonite Church. This

<sup>1</sup> Helwys, *An Advertisement*, pp. 39, 40, 1611.

<sup>2</sup> Evans, *Baptists*, i., 220.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

"great bakehouse" may have been an institution connected with the Church for the use of the community and the relief of its needy members. Some of the Mennonite Churches made experiments in communism, and put up peculiar bakehouses with chambers around and above them for the accommodation of the poor and aged in their fellowship. It was here that John Smith had his lodging.

Smith and his friends, being hindered for the time from becoming full members of the Church, the question arises as to whether they ventured to administer baptism and celebrate the Lord's Supper among themselves. There is no certain statement upon this point. I am inclined to think they now did without these ordinances, and finding their spiritual life none the less fresh and fervent, came to recognize that baptism and the Lord's Supper were only helps and not essentials to the life of religion in the heart. Here we come upon an idea which George Fox laid hold upon a generation later and impressed upon his followers in the Society of Friends. Out of his own experience Smith came to the conclusion that the regenerate man, "the new creature which is begotten of God, needeth not the outward scriptures, creatures, or ordinances of the Church to support or help" him yet "the regenerate, in love to others, can and will do no other than use the outward things of the Church for the gaining and supporting of others,"<sup>1</sup> and for that reason the outward ordinances are always necessary. He arrived at the conviction "that the outward baptism and supper do not confer and convey grace and regeneration to the participants or communicants; but, as the word preached, they serve only to support

<sup>1</sup> Propositions, 61, 62, in his *Confession of Faith*.

## Spiritual Religion Best

and stir up the repentance and faith of the communicants till Christ come, till the day dawn and the day-star arise in their hearts." It was his opinion "that the sacraments have the same use that the 'word' hath, that they are a *visible word* and that they teach to the eye of them that understand as the word teacheth the ears of them that have ears to hear." With the fine temper of rational mysticism which marked his last years, he declared "that the preaching of the word and ministry of the sacraments representeth the ministry of Christ in the spirit, who teacheth, baptizeth and feedeth the regenerate by the Holy Spirit inwardly and invisibly."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Propositions, 73, 74, 75.

## APPENDIX TO CHAPTER XIII

### SMITH'S PERSONAL CONFESSION OF FAITH

THE Mennonite archives contain a Latin document which is evidently the personal "Confession of Faith" of John Smith. It was probably presented to the elders of the Mennonite Church when he applied for admission to their fellowship. It is not dated, but internal evidence points to the year 1610 as the time of composition.

"We believe with the heart and with the mouth confess :—

"(1) That there is one God, the best, the highest, and most glorious Creator and Preserver of all ; who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

"(2) That God has created and redeemed the human race to his own image, and has ordained all men (no one being reprobated) to life.

"(3) That God imposes no necessity of sinning on any one ; but man freely, by Satanic instigation, departs from God.

"(4) That the law of life was originally placed by God in the keeping of the law ; then, by reason of the weakness of the flesh, was, by the good pleasure of God, through the redemption of Christ, changed into justification by faith ; on which account, no one can justly blame God, but rather, with his inmost heart, ought to revere, adore, and praise his mercy, that God should have rendered that possible to man, by his grace, which before, since man had fallen, was impossible by nature.

"(5) That there is no original sin, but all sin is actual and voluntary, viz., a word, a deed, or a design against the law of God ; and therefore infants are without sin.

"(6) That Jesus Christ is true God and true man ; viz., the Son of God taking to himself, in addition, the true and pure

## Smith's Personal Confession of Faith

nature of a man, of a true rational soul, and existing in a true human body.

“(7) That Jesus Christ, as pertaining to the flesh, was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary, afterwards was born, circumcised, baptized, tempted ; also that he hungered, thirsted, ate, drank, increased both in stature and in knowledge ; he was wearied, he slept, at last was crucified, dead, buried, he rose again, ascended into heaven ; and that to him as only King, Priest, and Prophet of the church, all power both in heaven and earth is given.

“(8) That the grace of God, through the finished redemption of Christ, was prepared for and offered to all without distinction, and that not feignedly but in good faith, partly by things made, which declare the invisible things of God, and partly by the preaching of the Gospel.

“(9) That as men, of the grace of God through the redemption of Christ, are able (the Holy Spirit, by grace preventing them) to repent, to believe, to turn to God, and to attain to eternal life ; so on the other hand, they are able themselves to resist the Holy Spirit, to depart from God, and to perish for ever.

“(10) That the justification of man before the Divine tribunal (which is both the throne of justice and of mercy), consists partly, of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ apprehended by faith, and partly of inherent righteousness, in the holy themselves, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, which is called regeneration or sanctification ; since any one is righteous, who doeth righteousness.

“(11) That faith, destitute of good works, is vain ; but true and living faith is distinguished by good works.

“(12) That the church of Christ is a company of the faithful ; baptized after confession of sin and of faith, endowed with the power of Christ.

“(13) That the church of Christ has power delegated to itself of announcing the word, administering the sacraments, appointing ministers, disclaiming them, and also excommunicating ; but the last appeal is to the brethren or body of the church.

“(14) That baptism is the external sign of the remission of sins, of dying and of being made alive, and therefore does not belong to infants.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

“(15) That the Lord’s Supper is the external sign of the communion of Christ, and of the faithful amongst themselves by faith and love.

“(16) That the ministers of the church are not only bishops, to whom the power is given of dispensing both the word and the sacraments, but also deacons, men and widows, who attend to the affairs of the poor and sick brethren.

“(17) That brethren who persevere in sins known to themselves, after the third admonition, are to be excluded from the fellowship of the saints by excommunication.

“(18) That those who are excommunicated are not to be avoided in what pertains to worldly business (*civile commercium*).

“(19) That the dead (the living being instantly changed) will rise again with the same bodies; not the substance but the qualities being changed.

“(20) That after the resurrection all will be borne to the tribunal of Christ, the Judge, to be judged according to their works; the pious, after sentence of absolution, will enjoy eternal life with Christ in heaven; the wicked, condemned, will be punished with eternal torments in hell with the devil and his angels.

“JOHN SMITH.”



## CHAPTER XIV

THE CHURCH OF HELWYS—A DECLARATION OF FAITH,  
1611—THE FIRST BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH  
—TESTIMONY TO SMITH—THE SIN OF IGNORANCE  
—HELWYS'S DECLARATION OF FAITH LARGELY  
DEPENDENT ON SMITH

NOW that John Smith had renounced his self-administered baptism and was seeking admission to the Mennonite Church, Thomas Helwys felt that he was left in the breach to defend the truth with an insignificant force at the back of him. He recognized the responsibility that was thrust upon him. Though he had not enjoyed so good an education as Smith, Clifton or Robinson he felt impelled to defend and define his position in print. He was well versed in the Scriptures, but he lacked the sense of proportion which a wider range of reading would have given. He meant well but his work suffered because he had not undergone the discipline of a thorough literary training. His style is exuberant and rambling. It is sometimes difficult to disengage his meaning from the tangle of his words. But in spite of all this his writings contain some passages which rise to the level of eloquence because of the intensity of feeling and depth of conviction from which they spring. The earnestness and sincerity of the man shine out through all his works.

The earliest publication by Helwys is important because it contains the first Confession of Faith set out

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by any company or Church of English Baptists. It is noteworthy that this Confession was compiled by a layman. Helwys contended for the equality of the simple Church member in knowledge of spiritual and religious things with the most learned of those versed in human knowledge. The position he took up upon this matter was of utmost significance in the after history of the English Baptists. It helped to make their Churches the most democratic of any, and did away with the danger of sacerdotal domination. But there were those amongst them who pressed this position to an extreme, and came to look upon the "humanities" with positive dislike and suspicion. They regarded learning not as the handmaid and help of religion but as a veritable hindrance to the true religion of the heart. This note is frequently heard. It was a wholesome protest against the exaggerated importance attached to scholastic learning. It served to remind the world that knowledge of letters and arts does not take the chief place in religion. But it was soon seen that mere scorn of learning did not avail and that the better course was to enlist it in the service of religion.

The title of the first book by Helwys runs as follows :—

"A Declaration [of]<sup>1</sup>  
Faith of English  
People Remaining at Am-  
sterdam in Holland.

Heb. 11, 6.

Without Faith it is impossible to please  
God. Heb. 11.

Rom. 14, 23.

Whatsoever is not off Faith is sin.

Prynted 1611."

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<sup>1</sup> The copy in York Minster Library has the top right hand corner of the title-page torn. It is bound up with a copy of the 1607 issue of the Latin version of the *Confession of Faith*, issued in 1598, by Johnson and Ainsworth.

## A Declaration of Faith

Though Helwys had the master hand in this work yet it was issued with the help and consent of the members of his little Church. They felt impelled to publish it in order to defend "the Truth of God" which they professed, and especially because of "the fearful falls of some that hath been of us," and also for the purpose of clearing themselves from the unjust charges which men commonly brought against them.

"Our purpose"—they say—"being to publish our faith with the warrant thereof, let it not seem strange that our writing bears not that proportion that writings usually do, in that we are simple men, destitute of art to order and beautify (bewtifie) our writings withal, which is one special cause that maketh us with all unwillingness to write, but we trust the truth of GOD shall not be less regarded of the lovers thereof because of our simplicity."<sup>1</sup>

This Declaration of Faith consists of twenty-seven brief articles, several of which were framed with the immediate controversies of the time directly in view. The two points in their belief upon which Helwys and his followers were most sharply criticized, related to (1) the nature and extent of Christ's redemptive work, and (2) the proper subjects of baptism. Some space is given to a statement of their position upon these topics, apart from the Declaration itself.

"We hold"—say they—"that Adam being fallen and in him all mankind, the LORD being equally just and merciful hath by CHRIST redeemed Adam and in him all mankind (not restored him), yet all actual transgressors must repent and believe and by faith in JESUS CHRIST be justified or else perish in their transgressions. Now hereby we hold . . .

<sup>1</sup> *A Declaration, etc.* Sig. A 2.

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that the LORD creates no man to damnation but that men bring it upon themselves by their own sins (Ezek. 18, 20) and that therefore all infants as well as any dying before they have committed actual sin are redeemed by CHRIST, their estates and conditions being all one. We beseech all that fear God weigh seriously, what grievous cause of offence there is herein.<sup>1</sup>

“Secondly, we hold that men confessing their faith and sins are only to be Baptized and that infants not being capable of the word of GOD nor of faith and repentance are also incapable of the Baptism of repentance. And we pray the wise-hearted advisedly to consider to what end should infants be washed with that water, it not being commanded nor practised . . . . Why should men make a ceremonial ordinance of a substantial ordinance, for certainly if it must be administered upon infants it is only a ceremony or shadow, for the infant is not then truly mortified and sanctified, and, it may be, never will. Ye men of understanding, fearing GOD, look unto your judgments and practices in these things, and in all things walk by rule from the Word of truth. What rule or warrant can be produced that you should take the word of GOD and the holy ordinances of the New Testament, which are all real and substantial, and administer them unto or upon a young infant and so make them of no effect? Why are you thus carried away with the traditions of men? You have begun to go towards reformation, ye have cast away the cross, ye have put by sureties [*i.e.*, godfathers and godmothers] but the father (if he will) may answer and take charge. Go on but one step further and let the party baptized answer and take charge of himself, and then there will be comfort in administering and comfort to whom it is administered. Let nothing be wanting that the Lord requireth in his word lest you be reproved with the young man in the gospel. We trust the LORD in time will give you to see these things, and not so only, but both you and us to see further things whereof we are ignorant (for none hath attained unto it), if we will but see our ignorance and in humility willingly seek knowledge.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Helwys obviously expected the answer—“None.”

<sup>2</sup> *Declaration, etc.*

## Helwys Differs from Brownists

Helwys, in order to show at once the reasonableness of his own position and where it differed from that of the Brownists or Separatists, proceeded to set it out in a series of short propositions embodying the scriptural warrant for his belief :—

“We hold that GOD in his first promise concerning CHRIST was merciful to all mankind alike, all mankind being under one and the same transgression.

“You hold not.

“We hold, with the Apostle, 1 Tim. 2, 6, that Christ gave himself a ransom for all men and that he is the saviour of all men, but especially of them that believe, 1 Tim. 4—10; and that he is the reconciliation not only for the sins of the faithful but for the sins of the whole world. 1 John, 22.

“You hold otherwise.

“Again, we hold that as our saviour CHRIST commanded, Mat. 28, 19—Men must teach and Baptize.

“You hold they may Baptize and not teach. Or thus :—We hold they that believe may be Baptized. Acts 8, 37.

“You hold, they that believe not.

“Where is this so great cause of offence? Why do you displease yourselves so much at us, especially you which are called the ‘Seperacion,’ as to alienate your affections, estrange your speeches, and change your countenances as though we were monsters or at the least wild men?”

After dealing in this way with the two outstanding features in their belief which marked off his little Church from the rest of their countrymen Helwys took pains to show that they held this belief from their own personal conviction and not upon the authority of any particular teacher. The remarkable passage in which he points this out gives indirect testimony to the attractiveness and power of John Smith’s personality, and reveals the compelling force of that conviction of truth which could

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

lead to the severance of such an intimate fellowship as the following words of Helwys indicate :

"Whereas formerly it hath been thought and reported that we held these things, being seduced by Mr. Smyth, we being now, through the great grace mercy and favour of GOD towards us (though through cruel malice of Sathan against us, and spirit of error in him), divided from him, we pray a change of that judgment. And we trust we shall approve unto all men that we hold our faith of Conscience to GOD from the ground of the Scriptures. And yet let no man think that we could not willingly have undergone that reproach and far greater to have still enjoyed him. Yea, what would we not have endured or done? Would we not have lost all we had? Yea, would we not have plucked out our eyes? Would we not have laid down our lives? Doth not GOD know this? Do not men know it? Doth not he know it? Have we not neglected ourselves, our wives, our children and all we had and respected him? And we confess we had good cause so to do in respect of those most excellent gifts and graces of GOD that then did abound in him. And all our love was too little for him and not worthy of him. And therefore let none think and let not him think but that our souls have and do mourn for the loss of such a man and if the LORD had taken him away from us we might have cried (bear with our foolishness) the chariot and the horsemen of Israel. But he hath forsaken the LORD's truth, he is fallen from grace. And though the fowler had spread his net and laid it, the net is broken and we are escaped blessed and praised be our GOD. Yet had he fallen alone our grief had been full enough, but in that so many so near and so dear unto us are fallen with him hereby hath he out of measure enlarged his own sin and our grief. But our comfort is in the LORD alone and in his Holy Truth and if the LORD had not now held us up we had surely fallen. And we trust we shall be established, for God is able to make us stand. Let not all these things distaste any man of the Truth nor keep back any from it, but rather encourage men unto it, in that the Lord hath so mercifully preserved a poor remnant. And let men look to the cause and not to the accidents, and yet if they do look to the accidents they shall see the like in



# Of Yourselves Judge What is Right

the Churches of GOD [the Apostolic Churches of primitive times] where men were baptized confessing their faith and their sins."<sup>1</sup>

Helwys felt that there was far too much dependence amongst professing Christians upon what this or that Reformer had taught and far too little experimental and personal knowledge of religious truth.

"If you believe or profess any thing because it is the judgment or exposition of Mr. Calvin, Mr. Beza, Mr. Perkins or any other never so highly respected amongst you either dead or living, you hold the glorious gospel of CHRIST in respect of persons."

If a person condemned an error merely on the authority of such teachers, his act of condemnation would be a "sin" because he himself did not actually know the thing he condemned to be erroneous. Helwys laboured to prove that it was a sin "to be ignorant of God's truth," and he tangled himself up in an argument to demonstrate that "if a man commit but one sin and repent not he is guilty of all" . . . and that "to be ignorant of any one part of GOD'S Truth is sin and unpardonable without repentance."<sup>2</sup> He placed the emphasis upon repentance. If only men would humbly acknowledge their ignorance in divine things and repent of it and cast themselves utterly upon God, then all, learned and unlearned alike, would have a clear start and be enlightened with heavenly wisdom. It seems to me that Helwys is here trying to make plain to others an experience which he himself had gone through. He takes no credit to himself except for acknowledging his

<sup>1</sup> *The Declaration of Faith*, 1611. Sig. A 4—Sig. B.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* Sig. B 4.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

ignorance of divine things and repenting of his ignorance. He found peace and light in assuming an attitude of absolute dependence upon God and submission to the guidance of his Holy Spirit in the interpretation of his word given in the Scriptures. The experience which had come to him he desires others to share. He erred in thinking that a similar experience was a necessity for the salvation of all. He argues from his own case to the whole of humankind. After quoting passages from Scripture (Jer. xxxi. 33, John xiv. 26, 1 John ii. 27) to show that a time was foreshadowed when men would be taught of God and led by his Spirit he proceeds :—

“All this is not written to take away the Holy ordinance of teaching, but to inform the people of GOD that they must have their knowledge out of the word of GOD by the teaching of the Spirit of GOD that they may be able to try the teaching of their Teachers and not be tied to understand the Scriptures as they expound them. But that they may be able to say with good consciences, we believe it not because you our teachers teach us thus, for we know you are also ignorant and subject to error, but we believe it because we know it to be the truth of God and that of our own knowledge from the word of GOD by the testimony of the Spirit of GOD. And this knowledge must every one have that will be saved.”

. . . . .

“We beseech you [Teachers or Preachers] therefore in the bowels of compassion, if there be any compassion or mercy in you be not so confident in your former understandings, which in many things you have but by tradition and from the writings and practices of other men. Hear us with patience. We speak in the uprightness of our hearts unto you, for the advancement of GOD's glory, the overthrow of your souls and of the souls of the poor people of GOD that do too much depend upon you ; for whom we wish that we could shed rivers of tears because we

## Knowledge, Human and Divine

know that they have many excellent things in them and that they have the zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. They are our natural countrymen and divers of them our loving kindred in the flesh, and some our most worthy and dear friends to whom we owe the best fruits of our lives and the entirest affections of our hearts. And therefore blame us not if we use all the means that we can by the Word of God to draw them to the sight of the sin of ignorance which doth so overshadow all men for the which sin all men must perish if they repent not."

Helwys manfully pleads for the layman's capacity for attaining knowledge of divine truth. "Long and tedious courses of study in reading the writings of other men" were not necessary. Let the plain man read the Scriptures, asking help of God. If he went to the Bible in the right spirit it would yield up its treasures. He indicates an "easy way," and that is:

"— to read the Scriptures acknowledging your ignorance and ask understanding of GOD. And this is a way whereby the most simplest soul that seeks the truth in sincerity may attain unto the knowledge of salvation contained in the Word of GOD."

It was a way which he himself had tested and found "most blessed and comfortable."

## APPENDIX TO CHAPTER XIV

### A DECLARATION OF FAITH

THIS is the earliest printed Baptist Confession of Faith. It was issued by Thomas Helwys and his companions. Its close dependence upon the writings of John Smith has not hitherto been noted. Helwys gives the references 'Osæa,' 'Ezechiël' etc. following the Genevan Version to which he adhered more closely than Smith.

#### WE BELIEVE AND CONFESS<sup>1</sup>

##### I.

That there are THREE which bear record in heaven—the FATHER, the WORD, and the SPIRIT—and these three are one GOD in all equality (1 John v. 7, Phil. ii. 5, 6). By whom all things are created and preserved in Heaven and Earth (Gen. i.).

##### 2.

That this GOD in the beginning created all things of nothing (Gen. i. 1), and made man of the dust of the earth (chap. ii. 7) in his own image (chap. i. 27), in righteousness and true holiness (Ephes. iv. 24), yet being tempted fell by disobedience (chap. iii. 1—7). Through whose disobedience all men sinned (Rom. v. 12-19). His sin being imputed unto all, and so death went over all men.

##### 3.

That by the promised seed of the Woman 'IESVS CHRIST' his obedience, all are made righteous (Rom. v. 19). All are made alive (1 Cor. xv. 22). His righteousness being imputed unto all.

##### 4.

That notwithstanding this men are by nature the children of wrath (Ephes. ii. 3), born in iniquity and in sin conceived

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<sup>1</sup> *A Declaration of Faith of English People, etc.*, 1611. Sig. A 3—A 5. The only copy known to me is in York Minster Library.

## A Declaration of Faith

21.5  
(Psal. v. 15), wise to all evil but to good they have no knowledge (Jer. iv. 22). The natural man perceiveth not the things of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. ii. 14). And therefore man is not restored unto his former estate, but that as man in his estate of innocency having in himself all disposition unto good and no disposition unto evil yet being tempted might yield or might resist; even so now being fallen and having all disposition unto evil and no disposition or will unto any good, yet GOD giving grace, man may receive grace or may reject grace according to that saying (Deut. xxx. 19). I call heaven and earth to record this day against you that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing, therefore choose life that both thou and thy seed may live.

### 5.

That GOD, before the foundation of the world, hath predestinated that all that believe in him shall be saved (Ephes. i. 4, 12; Mark xvi. 16), and all that believe not shall be damned (Mark xvi. 16), all which he knew before (Rom. viii. 29). And this is the election and reprobation spoken of in the Scriptures concerning salvation and condemnation, and not that God has predestinated man to be wicked and so to be damned, but that man being wicked shall be damned. For God would have all men saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. ii. 4), and would have no man to perish but would have all men come to repentance (2 Pet. iii. 9), and willeth not the death of him that dieth (Ezek. xviii. 32). And therefore GOD is the author of no man's condemnation—according to the saying of the Prophet Hosea xiii. [9], Thy destruction, O Israel, is of thyself, but thy help is of me.

### 6.

That man is justified only by the righteousness of CHRIST apprehended by faith (Rom. iii. 28; Gal. ii. 16), yet faith without works is dead (James ii. 17).

### 7.

That men may fall away from the grace of GOD (Heb. xii. 15) and from the truth which they have received or acknowledged (chap. x. 26) after they have tasted of the heavenly gift and were made partakers of the HOLY GHOST, and have tasted of the good word of GOD and of the powers of the world to come (chap. vi. 4, 5). And after they have escaped from the filthiness of the world may be tangled again therein and overcome (2 Pet. ii. 20).

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That a righteous man may forsake his righteousness and perish (Ezek. xviii. 24, 26). And therefore let no man presume to think that because he hath, or had once, grace, therefore he shall always have grace. But let all men have assurance that if they continue unto the end they shall be saved. Let no man then presume, but let all work out their salvation with fear and trembling.

## 8.

That 'IESVS CHRIST' the Son of GOD, the second Person or subsistence in the Trinity, in the fullness of time was manifested in the flesh, being the seed of David and of the Israelites according to the flesh (Rom. i. 3, and ix. 5). The Son of Mary the Virgin made of her substance (Gal. iv. 4) by the power of the HOLY GHOST overshadowing her (Luke i. 35). And being thus true Man was like unto us in all things, sin only excepted (Heb. iv. 15), being one person in two distinct natures, 'TRUE GOD and TRUE MAN.'

## 9.

That 'IESVS CHRIST' is mediator of the New Testament between GOD and Man (1 Tim. ii. 5), having all power in heaven and in earth given unto him (Matt. xxviii. 18), being the only KING (Luke i. 33), PRIEST (Heb. vii. 24), and PROPHET (Acts iii. 22) of his Church. He also being the only Lawgiver hath in his Testament set down an absolute and perfect rule of direction for all persons at all times to be observed; which no Prince nor any whosoever may add to or diminish from, as they will avoid the fearful judgments denounced against them that shall so do (Rev. xxii. 18, 19).

## 10.

That the Church of CHRIST is a company of faithful people (1 Cor. i. 2, Eph. i. 1) separated from the world by the word and Spirit of GOD (2 Cor. vi. 17), being knit unto the LORD and one unto another by Baptism (1 Cor. xii. 13) upon their own confession of the faith (Acts, viii. 37) and sins (Matt. iii. 6).

## 11.

That though in respect of CHRIST the Church be one (Ephes. iv. 4), yet it consisteth of divers particular congregations, even so many as there shall be in the world; every of which congregations, though they be but two or three, have CHRIST given them with all the means of their salvation (Matt. xviii. 20,



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Rom. viii. 32, 1 Cor. iii. 22) are the Body of CHRIST (1 Cor. xii. 27) and a whole Church (1 Cor. xiv. 23), and therefore may and ought, when they are come together, to pray, prophesy, break bread, and administer in all the holy ordinances, although as yet they have no officers or that their officers should be in prison, sick, or by any other means hindered from the Church [1 Pet. iv. 10, and ii. 5].<sup>1</sup>

### 12.

That as one congregation hath CHRIST so hath all (2 Cor. x. 7), and that the Word of GOD cometh not out from any one, neither to any one congregation in particular (1 Cor. xiv. 36), but unto every particular 'CHVRCH' as it doth unto all the world (Coll. i. 5, 6). And therefore no Church ought to challenge any prerogative over any other.

### 13.

That every Church is to receive in all their members by Baptism upon confession of their faith and sins wrought by the preaching of the Gospel according to the primitive institution (Matt. xxviii. 19) and practice (Acts ii. 41). And therefore Churches constituted after any other manner or of any other persons are not according to CHRIST'S Testament.

### 14.<sup>2</sup>

That baptism or washing with water is the outward manifestation of dying unto sin and walking in newness of life (Rom. vi. 2, 3, 4). And therefore in no wise appertaineth to infants.

### 15.<sup>2</sup>

That the Lord's Supper is the outward manifestation of the Spiritual communion between CHRIST and the faithful mutually (1 Cor. x. 16, 17) to declare his death until he come (1 Cor. xi. 26)

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<sup>1</sup> These references are added in a contemporary hand in the York Minster Library copy. They are printed by Crosby ii., 1739, appendix 1; so the addition must have been made in his copy also. The strong assertion of congregational independency and autonomy in this and the succeeding article is directed against the position of John Smith, who by 1610 had come to the conclusion that if a true Church was already in existence then, for the sake of order, affiliation should be sought from that Church and baptism and ordination received from its minister.

<sup>2</sup> Compare Smith's personal confession, sections 14 and 15, "That baptism is the outward sign of the remission of sins of dying and being made alive again, and therefore does not pertain to infants. That the Lord's Supper is the outward sign of the communion of Christ and of the faithful mutually by faith and love."

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## 16.

That the members of every Church or congregation ought to know one another, that so they may perform all the duties of love one towards another, both to soul and body (Matt. xviii. 15 ; 1 Thess. v. 14 ; 1 Cor. xii. 25). And especially the Elders ought to know the whole flock, whereof the HOLY GHOST hath made them overseers (Acts xx. 28 ; 1 Pet. v. 2, 3). And therefore a Church ought not to consist of such a multitude as cannot have particular knowledge one of another.

## 17.

That brethren impenitent in [any]<sup>1</sup> one sin after the admonition of the Church are to be excluded the Communion of the Saints (Matt. xviii. 17 ; 1 Cor. v. 4—13). And therefore not the committing of sin doth cut off from the Church but refusing to hear the Church to reformation.

## 18.<sup>2</sup>

That ex-communicants in respect of civil society are not to be avoided (1 Thes. iii. 15 ; Mat. xviii. 17).

## 19.

That every Church ought (according to the example of CHRIST'S disciples and primitive churches) upon every first day of the week being the LORD'S day to assemble together to pray, prophesy, praise GOD, and break bread, and perform all other parts of spiritual communion, for the worship of GOD, their own mutual edification, and the preservation of true religion and piety in the Church (John xx. 19 ; Acts ii. 42, and xx. 7 ; 1 Cor. xvi. 2). And that [they] ought not to labour in their callings, according to the equity of the moral law (Exod. xx. 8, etc.), which CHRIST came not to abolish but to fulfil.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Any" is supplied in MS. in Minster Library copy ; it is printed also by Crosby, ii., Appendix 1, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. this and the preceding article with sections 17 and 18 in John Smith's personal confession of faith, "Excommunicants are not to be avoided in respect of civil society (*civile commercium*)."

<sup>3</sup> Helwys has here borrowed verbally from John Smith's *Character of the Beast*, 1609 :—

"We acknowledge that according to the precedent of Christ's disciples and the primitive churches, the Saints ought upon the first day of the week,

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## 20.<sup>1</sup>

That the officers of every Church or congregation are either Elders, who by their office do especially feed the flock concerning their souls (Act xx. 28; 1 Pet. v. 2, 3), or deacons—men and women—who by their office relieve the necessities of the poor and impotent brethren concerning their bodies (Act vi. 1—4).

## 21.

That these officers are to be chosen when there are persons qualified according to the rules in Christ's Testament (1 Tim. iii. 2—7; Tit. i. 6—9; Act vi. 3, 4), by election and approbation of that Church or congregation whereof they are members (Act vi. 3, 4, and xiv. 23), with fasting prayer and laying-on of hands (Acts xiii. 3, and xiv. 23). And there being but one rule for Elders, therefore but one sort of Elders.<sup>2</sup>

## 22.

That the officers of every Church or congregation are tied by office only to that particular congregation whereof they are chosen (Act xiv. 23, and xx. 17; Tit. i. 5). And therefore they cannot challenge by office any authority in any other congregation whatsoever, except they would have an Apostleship.

## 23.

That the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are written for our instruction (2 Tim. iii. 16), and that we ought to search

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which is called the Lord's Day, Rev. i. 10, to assemble together to pray, prophesy, praise God, and break bread, and perform other parts of spiritual communion for the worship of God, their own mutual edification, and the preservation of true religion and piety in the Church, and that we might be better enabled to the foresaid duties we ought to separate ourselves from the labours of our callings which might hinder us thereto and that according to these Scriptures. John 20, 19. Act 2, 41, 42, and 20, 7. 1 Cor. 16, 1." Epistle to the Reader.

In saying "Christ came not to abolish" the law, Helwys is having a fling at Smith, who affirmed "all the ordinances of the Old Testament, viz., the church, ministry, worship, and government of the Old Testament to be abolished, all which were types and shadows of God's things to come." *Character of the Beast*, Epistle.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. section 16 in Smith's personal confession.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Smith's statement in 1608, "All the Elders have the same office of the pastor, and so are all of one sort." *Differences of the Churches*, p. 23.

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them for they testify of CHRIST (John v. 39), and therefore to be used with all reverence as containing the Holy Word of GOD which only is our direction in all things whatsoever.<sup>1</sup>

## 24.

That magistracy is a Holy Ordinance of GOD, that every soul ought to be subject to it, not for fear only, but for conscience sake. Magistrates are the ministers of GOD for our wealth. They bear not the sword for nought. They are the ministers of GOD to take vengeance on them that do evil (Rom. xiii. chap.). That it is a fearful sin to speak evil of them that are in dignity and to despise government (2 Pet. ii. 10). We ought to pay tribute, custom, and all other duties. That we are to pray for them, for GOD would have them saved and come to the knowledge of his truth (1 Tim. ii. 1—4). And therefore they may be members of the “Church of CHRIST” retaining their magistracy, for no Holy Ordinance of God debarreth any from being a member of CHRIST’S Church. They bear the sword of GOD, which sword in all lawful administration is to be defended and supported by the servants of GOD that are under their government, with their lives and all that they have, according as in the first institution of that Holy Ordinance. And whosoever holds otherwise must hold (if they understand themselves) that they [*i.e.*, magistrates] are the ministers of the Devil and therefore not to be prayed for, nor approved in any of their administrations, seeing all things they do (as punishing offenders and defending their countries, state, and persons by the sword) is unlawful.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It is significant that there is no section giving his view of the Scriptures in Smith’s personal confession.

<sup>2</sup> This article was evidently written by Helwys with the following passage by Smith before him. The Mennonites regarded the holding of Magisterial office as incompatible with membership in the Christian Church. “Concerning Magistrates we acknowledge them to be the ordinance of the Lord, that every soul ought to be subject unto them, that they are the ministers of God for our wealth, that we ought to be subject unto them for conscience sake, that they are the ministers of God to take vengeance on them that do evil, that we ought to pray for them that are in authority: that we ought not to speak evil of them that are in dignity nor to despise government, but to pay tribute toll custom etc., and that according to these Scriptures, Rom. 13, 1—7; 1 Tim. 22; 1 Pet. 2, 13—15; 2 Pet. 2, 10; Jude v. 8. But of Magistrates converted to the Faith and admitted into the Church by baptism there may many questions

# A Declaration of Faith

25.<sup>1</sup>

That it is lawful in a just cause for the deciding of strife to take on oath by the name of the LORD (Heb. vi. 16; 2 Cor. i. 23; Phil. i. 8).

26.<sup>2</sup>

That the dead shall rise again, and the living being changed in a moment, having the same bodies in substance, though divers in qualities (1 Cor. xv. 52 and 38; Job xix. 25—28; Luke xxiv. 30).

27.<sup>3</sup>

That after the resurrection all men shall appear before the judgment seat of CHRIST to be judged according to their works, that the godly shall enjoy life eternal, the wicked being condemned shall be tormented everlastingly in Hell (Mat. xxv. 46).

And now that we have truly set down our faith and ground thereof, let it be duly and conscionably considered what just cause there is that our profession, and we, should be made so odious as we are.

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be made which to answer *neither will we if we could,\* neither can we if we would*. When such things fall out the Law [query, Lord] doubt not will direct us into the truth concerning that matter. In the meantime we are assured according to the Scriptures that the Kings of the earth shall at length bring their glory and honour to the visible church. Rev. 21, 24." *Character of the Beast*. Epistle to Reader.

<sup>1</sup> Crosby has run articles 24 and 25 together, an error which Dr. Underhill followed in his *Confessions of Faith*, as he could find no original copy of this Declaration.

<sup>2</sup> Compare these articles with sections 19 and 20 in Smith's personal confession of faith. *Ante*, p. 202.

\* In the British Museum copy this is corrected in MS. as follows: "which to answer we cannot if we would."

## CHAPTER XV

### HELWYS ON GOD'S DECREE, GENERAL REDEMPTION AND THE STATE OF INFANTS

HELWYS soon followed up his first excursion into print by publishing another little volume, in which he dealt more at length with one or two features in his belief which had been briefly touched upon in the "Declaration of Faith." The religious atmosphere of Amsterdam was disturbed at this time by heated controversies about predestination and election and the nature of Christ's redemptive work and the extent of its beneficent operation. Helwys felt impelled to search into these deep questions and to deliver his judgment upon them to the world. He was convinced that Christ died for all men and not merely for the elect; consequently he strongly opposed the Calvinistic doctrines of particular election and redemption. In accordance with the general belief of the time, he took it for granted that the narrative in Genesis gave an historical account of the origin of man. This implicit belief in the historicity of Adam gives an archaic flavour to the arguments of Helwys upon these topics. The world is slowly adjusting itself to a different belief as to how man came into being, but in the battle between determinism and free will you only have a wider aspect of the questions about which Calvinists and Arminians eagerly disputed



## Christ Died for All

in bygone days. To understand Helwys we must try to understand his view upon these debated questions. We must not expect to find in him a complete and consistent philosophical scheme of things. We rather have in him the plain man, not without strong sense and strong feeling, looking into the Bible to see what it has to say on these deep matters—a man not afraid, if need be, to leave the question with a ragged edge, so long as the goodness, mercy and justice of God are vindicated.

He entitled his book "A short and plain Proof by the Word and works of God, that God's decree is not the cause of Man's sin or condemnation. And that all Men are redeemed by Christ as also that no Infants are condemned. . . . Printed 1611." The dedicatory epistle, dated June 2, 1611, carries his signature "Tho: Helwys." The prefatory epistle shows the occasion and scope of the work and we cannot do better than quote from it and let it explain itself:—

"Whereas we formerly in a little treatise entitled 'A Declaration of Faith of English People remayning at Amsterdam,' have in the fifth Article in short set down our faith of Election and Reprobation concerning salvation and condemnation; there having been some private opposition since we writ it, the love of God and unto his truth constraineth us to speak thus much more as we are able for the maintenance of this clear light of truth;—That God hath not in his eternal decree appointed some particular men to be condemned and so hath redeemed but some;

"But that Christ is given a ransom for all men, yea, even for the wicked that bring swift damnation upon themselves denying the Lord that hath bought them (2 Pet. ii. 1). It may and will seem strange that we of all others should take in hand to deal in a cause of so great controversy and so deep a mystery, to which we answer that it concerns us as much as any and therefore though we be not so able as we desire we were, yet because we ought we are ready to show ourselves willing with the best ability

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

we have. And in that it is a deep mystery (as the whole truth of God is) the more need had we to search into it, that by the grace of God we might find the depth of it so far as God hath revealed [it] in his word, as all men ought to do."<sup>1</sup>

Helwys revolted against the high Calvinistic doctrine then in vogue in the Protestant circles of Holland and England.

"They that hold this fearful opinion, hold that God would not have some men, yea, the most men to believe, but hath decreed their condemnation. And though the Holy Ghost say (Acts, xvii. 30) that now God admonisheth *all* men everywhere to repent, yet they of this opinion that hold that God hath decreed to reprobate some, say he would not have *all* but *some* to repent. And if they would speak plainly and not halt betwixt opinions they must say that God would have some to be unbelievers and wicked and disobedient. And that were the highest blasphemy. It were above the wickedness of the fool that saith in his heart there is no God, for it were to say there is a Wicked God that hath decreed wickedness."<sup>2</sup>

In the judgment of Helwys the practical effects of the doctrines of particular election and reprobation were bad. This doctrine, said he, works "presumption in men." He put the matter in this way:—

"If men can but once get a persuasion in themselves that God hath elected them then they are secure, they need not work out their salvation with fear and trembling, for God having decreed them to be saved they must be saved. If they increase and grow in knowledge and grace it is well, but if they do not it is all one, for it is decreed they must be saved and this causeth a slothful, careless and negligent profession."<sup>3</sup>

In another direction Helwys saw this doctrine to be mischievous. He says it "makes some despair utterly

<sup>1</sup> *Short and Plaine Prooffe*. The Epistle "to all that waite for salvation by Iesus Christ." Unique copy in Bodleian Library.

<sup>2</sup> Sig. B 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*.

## General Baptists and Particular Baptists

as thinking there is no grace for them and that God hath decreed their destruction. And it makes others desperately careless, holding that if God have decreed they shall be saved then they shall be saved, and if God have decreed they shall be damned they shall be damned and in a desperate carelessness run headlong to destruction.”<sup>1</sup>

We can trace to their source in Helwys some of the distinctive ideas and arguments which separated English-speaking Baptists into two camps—the “General” and the “Particular”—for well nigh 300 years. Some of the very phrases and party watchwords in the controversy make their appearance in his pages. Let one example stand for all. After quoting many Scriptural passages to prove that Christ’s sufferings were sufficient to take away Adam’s sin and to support the doctrine of *general* redemption, Helwys proceeds:—

“What shall we need to allege any more grounds of scripture to prove that Christ hath redeemed all men and that he would have no man perish. These may suffice. Oh, that they might suffice! What gladness should come to our souls to see men tractably minded to submit themselves to the Word of Truth, which is so evident in this point. Far be it from any fearing God, either of a forward or negligent mind to pass by this great point, though hand-led by so weak means, by reason of which exceeding weakness we are not able to the full desire of our souls to discover the depth of the mystery of iniquity in this opinion of Particular Election and Reprobation and so of Particular Redemption, nor to show forth the great mystery of godliness in the true and holy understanding of Universal or the General Redemption of all by Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

While advocating this doctrine Helwys sought to guard against the charge of holding the doctrine of Free

<sup>1</sup> Sig. B 2, *verso*.

<sup>2</sup> *Short and Plaine Prooffe*, Sig. B 4.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

Will as ordinarily understood, which men usually thought "must needs follow this understanding of universal redemption." The doctrine of Free Will was in bad odour in the religious circles of the time, and the little group of believers under Helwys resented the charge of favouring it. Accordingly there is a note, in black letter, on the last page of this little book directed against those who made the accusation. "If their meaning," says Helwys, "were free will in Christ and that we have free power and ability through Christ to work out our salvation, and that through Christ we are made able to every good work such a free will we hold. But that man hath any free will or power in himself to work his own salvation or to choose life we utterly deny, having learned of the Apostle, Ephes. ii. 8, 9, that by grace men are saved through faith and *that* not of themselves but of the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast himself." In his opinion man had freedom to resist and reject salvation and work downward, but all his success on the upward path must be ascribed in the last resort to the grace and help of God. "Thus Christ offering himself, man hath power and doth reject Christ, put the word of God from him, resist the Holy Ghost and freely of his own will, work his own condemnation; but he hath no power to work his own salvation. And so much only to clear ourselves from that gross and fearful error of free will from the which the Lord in great mercy hath freed us."<sup>1</sup>

Before we take our leave of this brief treatise we may notice that Helwys dedicated it "to the ladie Bovves." He probably had some personal acquaintance with her,

<sup>1</sup> *Short and Plaine Prooffe, ad finem.*

## A Protestant Family

for he gives as one reason for this dedication "the faithful reverend loving respect I bear to you and that, from your own worthy deserts in the best things and in all good unto me." This lady was Isabel, the eldest sister of that Sir William Wray of Glentworth, to whom John Smith had dedicated his first work. She and her sister Frances, who had married in 1583 Sir George Saint Paule, of Lincolnshire, had been benefactors of Richard Bernard and other Puritan preachers. She had first married Godfrey Foljambe, who died June 14, 1595. A few years after his death she married Sir William Bowes (d. October 30, 1611) and thus became one of a family allied by marriage to John Knox. Sir William Bowes had succeeded his uncle, Sir Robert Bowes, in the Scottish Embassy, and was looked up to as a consistent Protestant. Helwys, in dedicating his book to this "Worthy Ladie," said, "I know there is none in the land that hath better means to procure a cause of religion to be handled according to the judgment of the best." He begged her either to secure "an upright conscionable sound answer from the word of truth to this ground here propounded ; or else to give glory to God and receive it for the blessed truth of God." The death of her husband a few months later would prevent her from giving much attention to the matter even if she had the will, and it does not appear that the little book of Helwys excited any special notice in England.

## CHAPTER XVI

### HELWYS AND THE MENNONITES—AN ADVERTISE- MENT TO THE NEW FRYESERS—THE QUESTION OF SUCCESSION

AFTER issuing his short and plain proof that all men are redeemed by Christ and no infants condemned, Helwys set about the work of publishing a little treatise which he had drawn up for the special purpose of enlightening the Mennonites on certain points about which he thought they erred. The work was composed in English, but a translation into Dutch was specially written out for the benefit of the Mennonite ministers and congregations. Helwys desired to define his position with respect to those Anabaptist congregations and prevent any hasty identification of his own followers with them. A fair copy of his work being made for the purpose of translation, the idea seems to have presented itself to him of publishing it in print. Accordingly there came out "An Advertisement or Admonition unto the Congregations which men call the New Fryesers<sup>1</sup> in the Lowe Countries, written in Dutche and published in Englis. Wherein is handled 4 Principall pointes of Religion :—

' 1. That Christ took his Flesh of Marie, having a true earthly naturall bodie.

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<sup>1</sup> This word has usually been read as Fryelers. The Rev. Alexander Gordon pointed out the error which arose from misreading a broken letter. The word indicates the new Frisian Anabaptists.



# The New Frisian Anabaptists Warned

"2. That a Sabbath or day of rest is to be kept holy everie First day of the weeke.

"3. That there is no Succession nor privilege to persons in holie things.

"4 That magistracie, being an holy ordinance of God, debarreth not anie from being of the Church of Christ. . . . Printed 1611."

We may let the prefatory epistle in this case also speak for itself. It is addressed "to Hans de Ries, Reynier Wybrantson and the congregations whereof they are," and opens as follows :—

"Having long desired to publish our Faith unto this nation, and in particular unto those congregations whereof you are (as we have formerly done to our own Nation) and also to make known the things wherein you and we differ and are opposite. We have now through the mercy of God thus far brought our desires to pass being only unsatisfied for our insufficiency that we are no better able to manifest your errors unto you."

Helwys proceeds to give the grounds and causes which led him to publish the work. One reason as he puts it was :—

"That we might through the grace of God (if your willing minds be thereunto) be instruments of good unto you herein, and the rather because you have been instruments of good in discovering divers of our errors unto us, which we acknowledge to the praise of God and with thankful hearts to you."

And he concludes this epistle in these words :—

"Thus we are constrained (for the defence of the truth of God we profess, and that we may not seem to justify you in your evils and to make it known unto all that we have good cause to differ from you) to publish these things in this manner as we do. And that it may appear unto all, and in your consciences, that we have strong grounds for these things wherein we differ from you, though we be weak in the maintenance of them. If any shall oppose part or all of that is here written we desire this equal kindness, that it may be set over into English for all our understandings as

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

we have caused this to be set over into Dutch for all yours. And if there be cause of reply we will by the assistance of God answer with all the ability wherewith God shall make us able. Fare you well. Peace and love with faith from God and from our Lord Jesus Christ be with all them that are in Christ Jesus. Amen.

THOMAS HELVYS."

It would be tedious to follow Helwys in all his argumentation upon the four special points he set out to handle in this book, but there are some passages in it that have reference to his relations with Smith, and others that help us to appreciate his own position more clearly, which will bear quotation. As to the toleration by these Anabaptists or Mennonites of differences of opinion about the person of Jesus, he says, "You have [some] amongst you that deny Christ to have taken flesh of Mary, some holding that he brought it from heaven and some not knowing from whence he brought it, both which destroy the faith of Christ."<sup>1</sup> . . . "This then is your great sin that you suffer many amongst you that maintain a false faith concerning where Christ had his flesh; and you approve and allow of some that hold and maintain no faith concerning where Christ had his flesh, and so do you approve and maintain them in their sin, for whatsoever any holds or maintains not of faith is sin. And to be ignorant of any part of that the Scriptures hath manifested is sin, and to determine to remain ignorant and so to continue unto the end is death, for without repentance any one sin is death as the apostle James sheweth. James 2, 10."<sup>2</sup>

With regard to the right and power of any company of

<sup>1</sup> *An Advertisement, etc.*, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

## The Question of Succession

Christians to revive and practise the true ordinance of baptism Helwys says:—

“If you [Dutch Mennonites] confess that the New Testament and all the rules and examples therein are general to all—then may all men in all places, whom the Lord by his word and spirit shall stir up and indue with gifts and graces, preach the gospel; and men being converted [may] baptize them. And so is your ‘Succession’ fallen to the ground. And therein have you no loss, if you love the Lord and his holy truth, for thereby shall the holy ordinances of Christ be set at liberty which you have kept in bondage, to the great dishonour of God and to the utter confusion of divers souls [Smith and his company] whose blood will be required at your hands (though they be perished in their own sins) if you repent not.”<sup>1</sup>

Helwys dealt at length with the question of Succession<sup>2</sup> which he regarded as the source of the trouble between himself and Smith. He bewailed the overthrow of the true Church which Smith had set up. He writes almost with anguish of his severance from his old friends. His feeling was intensified because he had got a fixed idea into his head that there could never be any reconciliation between them on the ground that Smith and his followers, having once seen the truth and abandoned it, were guilty of apostasy and the sin against the Holy Ghost. It is a singular example of a man being forced into an unchristian and uncharitable attitude against his own better feeling owing to a false inference from the Bible.

The defection of Smith and the requirements of the Dutch elders from those who sought fellowship with the Mennonites are glanced at in the following passage:—

“What truth, piety, or godliness is there in this that you should seek to make men either presently swallow up all your errors ignorantly to be washed of *you* with water, or else stay until they

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<sup>1</sup> *An Advertisement, etc.*, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> See also pages 20—55 of *An Advertisement, etc.*

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

have learned them, otherwise they must not be baptized at all. And further that men must be forced to learn your language and so until the poor disciples of Christ, that would follow him (English men or any other nation), can speak Dutch they are debarred from the holy ordinances of God and the means of salvation by this your rule—a fearful mystery of iniquity. Hereby you have wrought such wickedness amongst us, and brought such desolation upon us the poor people of God, as we have cause to wish that in our heads were floods of water and our eyes were fountains of tears, that we might pour out a complaint against you, for this your abomination which you have set up, whereby you have wrought such destruction and ruin in the Church of God, seeking to pull it down to build up yourselves. Hereby have you glorified your Church and set her up to sit as a Queen, taking unto yourselves all power and authority, yea, even to shut the gates of the Holy City and the Heavenly Jerusalem, saying that none may enter but by *your* authority. Oh! that you could see your great sin herein and the lamentable evil that you have wrought.

. . . . .

“Were this all our woe it were at full enough, but you have by this your great sin [*i.e.*, by the Mennonites insistence upon the doctrine of Succession] brought a further evil upon us than to make our enemies rejoice over us, saying, ‘There, there!’ ‘So would we have it,’ for you have made our friends our enemies, yea, our familiar friends with whom we took sweet counsel and went together to the house of God. And such is the enmity betwixt us and them (whereof you have been chief instrument), as it can never have end whilst any of us live, for it is that enmity which the Lord put between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, which can have no end in them except we fall into the same destruction. For there is no place to repentance to be found for their transgression, for they were once enlightened and had tasted of the heavenly gift and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and had tasted of the good word of God and of the powers of the world to come and are fallen away. It is impossible they should be renewed by repentance, seeing they crucify again to themselves the Son of God and make a mock of him (Heb. vi. 4, 5, 6).”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *An Advertisement, etc.*, pp. 33, 34.

## Former Views of Smith now Changed

"Now to show how they were once enlightened. First, Mr. John Smyth (upon whose head the blood of all this people shall be) hath by his profession in all his practice, and by word, and in his sundry writings with such force of argument and strength of protestation, with ground of truth (as his writings shew), manifested himself to be enlightened with *this* truth of God, 'That wheresoever two or three are gathered together into Christ's name, there Christ hath promised to be in the midst of them (Matt. xviii. 20), and therefore they are the people of God and Church of Christ, having right to Christ and all his ordinances, and need not seek to men to be admitted to the holy things, but may freely walk together in the way of God and enjoy all holy things.' From this truth of God, wherewith he was enlightened, is he fallen, denying the word of our Saviour Christ that saith, 'Wheresoever two or three are gathered, &c.,' and holdeth that the *first* two or three that are gathered together have only right to Christ and all his ordinances, and that *after* all men must come to *them*, restraining the words of Christ, which are general to any two or three, only to the first two or three, and so hath set up a succession against the which he hath formerly by all words, writings, and practice set himself with all detestation; and this man, like Balaam, hath consulted with you and hath put a stumbling block before the people of God, who were also enlightened, and so are many, as you know, fallen with him to the same sin and under the same condemnation."<sup>1</sup>

Helwys points out that "Mr. Jarvase Nevile,"<sup>2</sup> one of the leading members of Smith's company, who had suffered much for the truth, had gone further than Smith in this direction, and was now "exclaiming against" the Mennonites' succession, and striving "to build up the succession of Rome." Other points are instanced in which Helwys thought that his old leader had deserted the truth, but we have quoted at sufficient length to show

<sup>1</sup> *An Advertisement*, pp. 35, 36.

<sup>2</sup> I have traced no less than three contemporary Gervase Neviles connected with Notts. One was instituted as Rector of Grove in that county on September 21, 1611.



## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

how wide and deep the rift between them had become, and how bitter were the reproaches cast upon Smith by his old associate.

At the end of this book Helwys inserted "certain demands concerning God's decree of salvation and condemnation."<sup>1</sup> They were addressed "to all the most worthy Governors, Learned Teachers, and Godly people of all estates and conditions in these United Provinces," and were intended to mark out a short and easy way for settling the vexed questions in dispute between Calvinists and Arminians. After thankfully acknowledging the religious liberty allowed in Holland, Helwys proceeds :—

"We humbly crave now, that we may with favour and good acceptance use this Christian liberty thus far as to propound one ground of Religion by way of question and demand. And we doubt not (through the grace of God) but it being thoroughly and faithfully debated and tried by the godly wise and learned, it will put a short end to that long-continued controversy of God's eternal decree of life and death to salvation and condemnation."

He then proceeds to set down nine questions, the main object of which was to vindicate the Almighty from the charge of being the cause of any man's damnation. The last question sums up the whole :—

"Adam having then free will and power from God in and by his creation to obey and live, how can it possibly be said that God in his eternal decree decreed him or any man to condemnation?"<sup>2</sup>

The sublime confidence of Helwys in his ability to settle this question was characteristic of the man. His interposition in the fray between Remonstrants and Calvinists did not check in the least the onward sweep

<sup>1</sup> Title-page of *Advertisement, etc.*

<sup>2</sup> *An Advertisement*, p. 89. Sig. F 5.



## Calvinists and Arminians

of High Calvinism to its final crystallization at the Synod of Dort ; but it did testify to the intensity and reality of his own convictions. It demonstrated to the world that he had found some solution to the problem in which he himself could rest satisfied.

At the very end<sup>1</sup> of this book also Helwys put in a note "for the clearing of ourselves from the suspect [suspicion] of that most damnable heresy " of free will. This looks like hunting with the hounds and running with the hare. But his theory was that absolute free will belonged only to Adam in his state of innocence, and that all the rest of mankind stood in need of Christ. In his view free will "doth utterly abolish Christ," for it would enable a man to have power in himself to obey and so to stand in "no need of Christ." Helwys apparently felt it to be needful to mould his belief on this point to fit his interpretation of certain passages in the Pauline Epistles. He dared not trust the intuitions of his own nature, but actually maintained that both faith and knowledge were created qualities in man. It will be seen that his scheme was far from being consistent, however excellent from a pragmatic point of view he may have found it. There is one little self-revealing paragraph in this postscript with which we may close this chapter. In speaking on this topic of free will, Helwys, referring either to the Mennonites or to his old friends under Smith, says :—

"We know<sup>2</sup> not any certainty of these men's opinions, therefore we will not enter into them, only one man once told us he had free

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<sup>1</sup> *An Advertisement*, p. 91. "It is suspected that they which hold Universal Redemption do or must hold free will."

<sup>2</sup> *An Advertisement*, p. 92.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

will, but we found him to hold so many other horrible opinions wherein he was so obstinate, as we had no faith to have any further conference with him."

There were some topics, therefore, which Helwys felt it inadvisable to discuss, and from a full consideration of which he shrank.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE LAST DAYS AND THE LAST BOOK OF JOHN SMITH—HIS CONFESSION OF FAITH

THE life of John Smith was now drawing to a close. It had been a strenuous time, a life full of incident, full of spiritual and intellectual activity. He was probably only about forty years old, yet the flame of life began to flicker in the socket. Happily he had gained peace of mind and tranquility of soul, and his strange career ended in a restful calm. We have one little glimpse of his bearing in his last year, from the hand of a hostile writer. Christopher Lawne, complaining of the overbearing manner of Francis Johnson, whom he scornfully calls "S. Francis," contrasts the disposition of other Separatist leaders to Johnson's disadvantage.

"Master Smith<sup>1</sup> himself, though drunken with the dregs of error and strange phantasies (the beginning and ground whereof he boasteth to have sucked from his tutor S. Francis), yet is he in his demeanour nothing so haughty and proud as his Tutor declares himself."

This indicates his winsome and attractive manner. He had been inclined to consumption "before<sup>2</sup> he came out of England" and the disease now developed to such an extent that "he perceived that his life should not long

<sup>1</sup> Lawne's *Prophane Schisme*, 1612, p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> Bradford's *Sum of a Dialogue*, etc., 1648, in Young's *Chronicles*, p. 451.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

continue." By this time he was "practising physic" as a means of living and would be well aware of his critical condition. Still he worked on bravely to the end. As Helwys had drawn up a Declaration of Faith for his company, and the Mennonites had drafted a "Short Confession" for the guidance of the English, so also Smith employed himself in the last year of his life in compiling a series of "propositions and conclusions concerning the Christian religion" which embodied the Confession of Faith of the body of English Anabaptists who adhered to him.

He was also engaged in writing a little book in which he briefly surveyed the several controversies in which he had been concerned. In this work he retracted "all those biting and bitter words, phrases and speeches" which he had used against the Puritans of England, and as for his controversies with fellow Separatists he expressed the view that he had failed not in the matter but in "the manner of writing." He embodied in this treatise a brief and temperate answer to the provocative charges and imputations laid against him by Helwys in his "Declaration of Faith" of 1611. Smith had "done nothing in writing hitherto" against "Master Helwys his separation," but he now felt bound to take notice of what had been published against him from that quarter. It would seem that Smith left his work unfinished at the time of his death. His friends published it soon afterwards under the title "The last booke of John Smith, called the retractation of his errours and the confirmation of the truth." It was inserted after the Confession of Faith and there was appended to it what is called "The Life and death of John Smith," giving one or two details

## Last Book of John Smith

of his life at Amsterdam and a touching account of his last days and death. His last book was written "not long before his death" and it was his desire "that it should be published unto the world." These documents throw such light upon the opinions of Smith that we venture to reprint them in full.

In his illness he desired his wife and children to remain with the company of fellow-believers who had been faithful to him. Towards the close of August in the year 1612 he breathed his last surrounded by his family and "the brethren." His body was carried from his dwelling at the back of the "great bakehouse" of Jan Munter on the first of September<sup>1</sup> for burial in the Nieuwekerke (New Church) at Amsterdam. His was a brave soul in a fragile frame. Generous hearted and transparently sincere, he won the loving regard of those who knew him best and found at last the peace of God which passeth all understanding.

When John Robinson published his book on "Religious Communion Private and Public" in the year 1614, he placed at the end "A survey of the Confession of Faith published in certain conclusions by the remainders of Mr. Smyth's company." It is clear that he had a printed copy before him. He quoted, more or less fully, many of Smith's "conclusions" with which he disagreed. For years this Confession of Faith was lost. It was only partially known through Robinson's quotations, and some writers confused it with the Declaration of Faith issued by Helwys and his group. It was further noted that John Cotton was acquainted with this Confession by Smith and also with some account "of his

<sup>1</sup> Barclay's *Religious Societies of Commonwealth*, p. 95.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

life and death" attached to it. Cotton refers to it in a striking passage. Roger Williams had declared his great sense of peace and satisfaction since he had entered upon the Anabaptist way. Cotton rejoins "it is no new thing with Satan to transform himself into an angel of light and to cheer the soul with false peace and flashes of counterfeit consolation." He gives the case of Smith as an example :—

"Sad and woeful is the memory of Mr. Smith's strong consolation on his death-bed, which is set as a seal to his gross and damnable Arminianism and enthusiasm delivered in the Confession of his Faith prefixed to the story of his life and death."<sup>1</sup>

Those illuminating words not only reveal Cotton's temper, but also indicate that he had access to a copy of Smith's confession. On both sides of the Atlantic then, this work was referred to, but every copy seemed to have perished. At length Professor Müller found a Dutch version of this "Confession of Faith" in manuscript among the archives of the Waterlander Mennonite Church at Amsterdam. He made an excellent translation into English<sup>2</sup> and communicated it to Dr. B. Evans. Shortly afterwards attention was called to a printed copy in the York Minster Library in a unique little volume containing Smith's "Last Book" and the brief account of his life and death. This was reprinted by Mr. Robert Barclay in 1876. His work has long been out of print. The variations between the Dutch manuscript and the printed copy are slight but significant and will be indicated in the notes.

<sup>1</sup> Cotton's Letter examined and answered in *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution*. Hanserd Knollys Society, 1848, p. 389.

<sup>2</sup> Printed in Evans' *Early Baptists*, 1862, i., p. 257.



"THE CONFESSION OF FAYTH PUBLISHED IN  
CERTAYN CONCLUSIONS  
BY THE  
REMAYNERS OF MR. SMITHES COMPANY."

The following work is referred to by John Robinson under the above title. He had a printed copy before him. He also alludes to it as "Mr. Smith's Confession." The only known copy has no title page and begins abruptly with an epistle to the reader. The quotations from Scripture follow the Genevan Version in the main.

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THE EPISTLE TO THE READER

Considering that all means and helps are necessary for men, to provoke them to the practice of religion, and obedience of the truth, especially in this latter age of the world, when our Saviour Christ witnesseth that because of the bounding iniquity the love of many shall wax cold, which appeareth too manifest in these days. Therefore we have thought good to manifest unto thee (good reader) the manner of the life of (John Smith), remaining for a time at Amsterdam in Holland, and how he carried himself in his sickness, even unto his death. Whereunto we have annexed a small confession of faith : with a little treatise which he writ not long before his death, desiring that it should be published unto the world ; in the reading whereof we beseech thee to cast away prejudice, and be not forestalled with the supposed errors held by him, or us, nor with the censure of other, which have thrust themselves too far into the room of God, to judge things before the time ; but try all things, and take that which is good : and in trying, put on love, which will teach thee to interpret all things in the best part, and the rather, because that to take things in the evil part is the property of an evil mind. Even as the bee and spider coming both to one flower, the one taketh honey and the other poison, according to their nature, so it is with men : for he that is full despiseth an honeycomb, and the sick stomach abhorreth most pleasant meat, but to the sound and hungry all

## The Epistle to the Reader

good things have a good taste; even so it is in spiritual matters: and therefore we direct these things especially unto two sorts of men, the one is the careless professor, who placeth all his religion in knowledge, in speaking, and in outward profession; that such may know that true religion consisteth not in knowledge, but in practice, not in word but in power: and that such as have the form of godliness, and do deny the power thereof, are to be separated from: the other is the hungry soul, and the upright in heart, which seek the Lord, to let them see and know that there is in the Lord all sufficiency, and such a measure of grace to be attained unto, as that they may be made partakers of the Divine nature, and may come to the measure of the age of the fulness of Christ (Eph. iv. 13), and to bring every thought into the obedience of Christ. The which who so well considereth, it will cause them not to be careless and negligent, but careful and diligent, to use all means which may further them in this great work of the Lord. And know also, that the intent of the author is not to teach any man either to despise or neglect the holy ordinances, appointed by Jesus Christ for the help of His Church, nor to attribute unto them more than is meet, but to use them as means to bring us to the end; that is that the Lord hath not given His word, sacraments and the discipline of the Church unto His people, to the end that they should satisfy themselves with the outward obedience thereof, nor to think that all is well when they walk therein; but also to be translated into the obedience of that which the word teacheth, and the sacraments signify unto them; that is, to be made like to Jesus Christ in His life, sufferings, death, burial, resurrection and ascension, by being partakers with Him of one and the same spirit; consider what we say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.

T.P.<sup>1</sup>

“I have not concealed Thy mercy and Thy truth from the great congregation.” (Psal. xl. 10). “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth man confesseth to salvation.” (Rom. x. 10).

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Robert Barclay identified these letters as the initials of Thomas Piggott, who had been baptized by Smith and adhered to him when Helwys parted from him. His name, given as Pyggot, is in the list of those who signed the statement expressing regret that they took it in hand to baptize themselves.

# A Confession of Faith

Propositions and Conclusions  
concerning true Christian Religion  
conteyning A Confession of Faith of certaine  
English people, livinge at  
Amsterdam.

1. We believe that there is a God (Heb. xi. 6) against all Epicures and Atheists, which either say in their hearts or utter with their mouths that there is no God (Psal. xiv. 1; Isaiah xxii. 13).

2. That this God is one in number (1 Cor. viii. 4, 6) against the Pagans or any other that hold a plurality of gods.

3. That God is incomprehensible and ineffable, in regard of His substance or essence that is God's essence can neither be comprehended in the mind, nor uttered by the words of men or angels (Exod. iii. 13-15, and xxxiii. 18-21).

4. That the creatures and Holy Scriptures do not intend to teach us what God is in substance or essence, but what He is in effect and property (Rom. i. 19, 22; Exod. xxxiii. 23).

5. That these terms, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, do not teach God's substance, but only the hinder parts of God; that which may be known of God (Rom. i. ; Exod. xxxiii.)

6. That God may be known by His titles, properties, effects, imprinted and expressed in the creatures, and Scriptures (John xvii. 3).

7. That to understand and conceive of God in the mind is not the saving knowledge of God, but to be like to God in His effects and properties; to be made conformable to His divine and heavenly attributes. That is the true saving knowledge of God (2 Cor. iii. 18; Matt. v. 48; 2 Peter i. 4), whereunto we ought to give all diligence.

8. That this God manifested in Father, Son and Holy Ghost (Matt. iii. 16, 17) is most merciful, most mighty, most holy, most just, most wise, most true, most glorious, eternal and infinite (Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7; Psalm xc. 2 and cii. 27).

9. That God before the foundation of the world did foresee and determine the issue and event of all His works (Acts xv. 18), and that actually in time He worketh all things by His providence, according to the good pleasure of His will (Eph. i. 11), and there-

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fore we abhor the opinion of them that avouch that all things happen by fortune or chance (Acts iv. 27, 28; Matt. x. 29, 30).

10. That God is not the author or worker of sin (Psal. v. 4; James i. 13), but that God only did foresee and determine what evil the free will of men and angels would do; but He gave no influence, instinct, motion or inclination to the least sin.

11. That God in the beginning created the world viz., the heavens, and the earth and all things that are therein (Gen. i.; Acts xvii. 24). So that the things that are seen, were not of things which did appear (Heb. xi. 3).

12. That God created man to blessedness, according to His image, in an estate of innocency, free without corruption of sin (Gen. i. 27; ii. 17, 25); He created them male and female (to wit) one man and one woman (Gen. i. 27); He framed man of the dust of the earth, and breathed into Him the breath of life, so the man was a living soul (Gen. ii. 7; 1 Cor. xv. 45). But the woman He made of a rib, taken out of the side of the man (Gen. ii. 21, 22). That God blessed them, and commanded them to increase, and multiply, and to fill the earth, and to rule over it and all creatures therein (Gen. i. 28, ix. 1, 2; Psal. viii. 6).

13. That therefore marriage is an estate honourable amongst all men, and the bed undefiled: viz. betwixt one man and one woman (Heb. xiii. 4; 1 Cor. vii. 2), but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.

14. That God created man with freedom of will, so that he had ability to choose the good and eschew the evil, or to choose the evil and refuse the good, and that this freedom of will was a natural faculty or power, created by God in the soul of man (Gen. ii. 16, 17; iii. 6, 7; Eccles. vii. 29).

15. That Adam sinning was not moved or inclined thereto by God, or by any decree of God but that he fell from his innocency and died the death alone, by the temptation of Satan, his free will assenting thereunto freely (Gen. iii. 6).

16. That the same day that Adam sinned, he died the death (Gen. ii. 17), for the reward of sin is death (Rom. vi. 23), and this is that which the Apostle saith, dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. ii. 1), which is loss of innocency, of the peace of conscience and comfortable presence of God (Gen. iii. 7, 11).

17. That Adam being fallen did not lose any natural power or faculty which God created in his soul, for the work of the devil,

## A Confession of Faith

which is (sin), cannot abolish God's works or creatures : and therefore being fallen he still retained freedom of will (Gen. iii. 23, 24).

18. That original sin is an idle term, and that there is no such thing as men intend by the word (Ezek. xviii. 20), because God threatened death only to Adam (Gen. ii. 17) not to his posterity, and because God created the soul (Heb. xii. 9).

19. That if original sin might have passed from Adam to his posterity, Christ's death, which was effectual before Cain and Abel's birth, He being the lamb slain from the beginning of the world, stopped the issue and passage thereof (Rev. xiii. 8).

20. That infants are conceived and born in innocency without sin, and that so dying are undoubtedly saved, and that this is to be understood of all infants under heaven (Gen. v. 2, i. 27 compared with 1 Cor. xv. 49), for where there is no law there is no transgression, sin is not imputed while there is no law (Rom. iv. 15 and v. 13), but the law was not given to infants, but to them that could understand (Rom. v. 13; Matt. xiii. 9; Neh. viii. 3).

21. That all actual sinners bear the image of the first Adam, in his innocency, fall, and restitution in the offer of grace (1 Cor. xv. 49), and so pass under these three conditions, or threefold estate.

22. That Adam being fallen God did not hate him, but loved him still, and sought his good (Gen. iii. 8—15), neither doth he hate any man that falleth with Adam; but that He loveth mankind, and from His love sent His only begotten Son into the world, to save that which was lost, and to seek the sheep that went astray (John iii. 16).

23. That God never forsaketh the creature till there be no remedy, neither doth He cast away His innocent creature from all eternity; but casteth away men irrecoverable in sin (Isa. v. 4; Ezek. xviii. 23, 32, and xxxiii. 11; Luke xiii. 6, 9).

24. That as there is in all the creatures a natural inclination to their young ones, to do them good, so there is in the Lord toward man; for every spark of goodness in the creature is infinitely good in God (Rom. i. 20; Psal. xix. 4; Rom. x. 18).

25. That as no man begetteth his child to the gallows, nor no potter maketh a pot to break it; so God doth not create or predestinate any man to destruction (Ezek. xxxiii. 11; Gen. i. 27; 1 Cor. xv. 49; Gen. v. 3).



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26. That God before the foundation of the world hath determined the way of life and salvation to consist in Christ, and that he hath foreseen who would follow it (Eph. i. 5 ; 2 Tim. i. 9), and on the contrary hath determined the way of perdition to consist in infidelity, and in impenitency, and that he hath foreseen who would follow after it (Jude, 4th verse).

27. That as God created all men according to His image, so hath He redeemed all that fall by actual sin, to the same end ; and that God in His redemption hath not swerved from His mercy, which He manifested in His creation (John i. 3, 16 ; 2 Cor. v. 19 ; 1 Tim. ii. 5, 6 ; Ezek. xxxiii. 11).

28. That Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and that God in His love to His enemies did send Him (John iii. 16) ; that Christ died for His enemies (Rom. v. 10) ; that He bought them that deny Him (2 Peter ii. 1), thereby teaching us to love our enemies (Matt. v. 44, 45).

29. That Christ Jesus after His baptism by a voice out of heaven from the Father, and by the anointing of the Holy Ghost, which appeared upon His head in the form of a dove, is appointed the prophet of the church,<sup>1</sup> whom all men must hear (Matt. iii. ; Heb. iii. 1, 2) ; and that both by His doctrine and life, which He led here in the earth, by all His doings and sufferings, He hath declared and published, as the only prophet and lawgiver of His Church, the way of peace and life, the glad tidings of the Gospel (Acts iii. 23, 24).

30. That Christ Jesus is the brightness of the glory and the engraven form of the Father's substance, supporting all things by His mighty power (Heb. i. 3) ; and that he is become the mediator of the New Testament (to wit) the King, Priest, and Prophet of the Church, and that the faithful through Him are thus made spiritual Kings, Priests, and Prophets (Rev. i. 6 ; 1 John ii. 20 ; Rev. xix. 10).

31. That Jesus Christ is He which in the beginning did lay the foundation of the heavens and earth which shall perish (Heb. i. 10 ; Psalm cii. 26) ; that He is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last, He is the wisdom of God,

<sup>1</sup> Compare this with the opinion of Socinus that Christ was endued with His prophetic office after His baptism. *Racovian Catechism*, section v.



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which was begotten from everlasting before all creatures (Micah v. 2; Prov. viii. 24; Luke xi. 49); He was in the form of God, and thought it no robbery to be equal with God; yet He took to Him the shape of a servant, the Word became flesh (John i. 14), wonderfully by the power of God in the womb of the Virgin Mary; He was of the seed of David according to the flesh,<sup>1</sup> (Phil. ii. 7; Heb. 10; Rom. i. 3); and that He made Himself of no reputation, humbled Himself, and became obedient unto the death of the cross, redeeming us from our vain conversation, not with silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Himself, as of a lamb without spot and undefiled (1 Pet. i. 18, 19).

32. That although the sacrifice of Christ's body and blood, offered up unto God His Father upon the cross, be a sacrifice of a sweet smelling savour, and that God in Him is well pleased, yet it doth not reconcile God unto us, which did never hate us, nor was our enemy, but reconcileth us unto God (2 Cor. v. 19), and slayeth the enmity and hatred, which is in us against God (Ephes. ii. 14, 17; Rom. i. 30).

33. That Christ was delivered to death for our sins (Rom. iv. 25), and that by His death we have the remission of our sins (Eph. ii. 7), for He cancelled the hand-writing of ordinances, the hatred, the law of commandments in ordinances (Eph. ii. 15; Coloss. ii. 14) which was against us (Deut. xxxi. 26); He spoiled principalities and powers, made a shew of them openly, and triumphed over them on the cross (Coloss. ii. 15); by death He destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil (Heb. ii. 14).

34. That the enemies of our salvation, which Christ vanquished on His cross, are the gates of hell, the power of darkness, Satan, sin, death, the grave, the curse or condemnation, wicked men, and persecutors (Eph. vi. 12; 1 Cor. xv. 26, 54, 57; Matt. xvi. 18; Rev. xx. 10, 14, 15), which enemies we must overcome no otherwise than Christ hath done (John xxi. 22; 1 Pet. ii. 21; Rev. xiv. 4).

35. That the efficacy of Christ's death is only derived to them, which do mortify their sins, which are grafted with Him to the similitude of His death (Rom. vi. 3—6), which are circumcised

<sup>1</sup> The words in the earlier draft, "God having prepared him a body" are dropped in the printed copy, and the section is recast to make it less exceptional.

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with circumcision made without hands, by putting off the sinful body of the flesh, through the circumcision which Christ worketh (Coloss. ii. 11) who is the minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers (Rom. xv. 8 compared with Deut. xxx. 6).

36. That there are three which bear witness in the earth, the spirit, water and blood, and these three are one in testimony, witnessing that Christ truly died (1 John v. 8) for He gave up the ghost (John xix. 30); and out of His side pierced with a spear came water and blood (verse 34, 35), the cover of the heart being pierced, where there is water contained.

37. That every mortified person hath this witness in himself (1 John v. 10), for the spirit blood, and water of sin is gone, that is the life of sin with the nourishment and cherishment thereof (1 Pet. iv. 1; Rom. vi. 7; 1 John iii. 6).

38. That Christ Jesus being truly dead was also buried (John xix. 39, 42), and that He lay in the grave the whole Sabbath of the Jews; but in the grave He saw no corruption (Psal. xvi. 10; Acts ii. 31).

39. That all mortified persons are also buried with Christ, by the baptism which is into His death (Rom. vi. 4; Colos. ii. 12); keeping their Sabbath with Christ in the grave (that is) resting from their own works as God did from His (Heb. iv. 10), waiting there in hope for a resurrection (Psal. xvi. 9).

40. That Christ Jesus early in the morning, the first day of the week, rose again after His death and burial (Matt. xxviii. 6) for our justification (Rom. iv. 25), being mightily declared to be the Son of God, by the spirit of sanctification, in the resurrection from the dead (Rom. i. 4).

41. That these that are grafted with Christ to the similitude of His death and burial shall also be to the similitude of His resurrection (Rom. vi. 4, 5); for He doth quicken or give life unto them, together with Himself (Coloss. ii. 13; Eph. ii. 5, 6); for that is their salvation, and it is by grace (Eph. ii. 5; 1 John v. 11, 12, 13; Titus iii. 5, 6, 7).

42. That this quickening or reviving of Christ, this laver of regeneration, this renewing of the Holy Ghost, is our justification and salvation (Titus iii. 6, 7). This is that pure river of water of life clear as crystal, which proceedeth out of the throne of God, and of the Lamb (Rev. xxii. 1); which also floweth out of the belly

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of him that believeth in Christ (John vii. 38); this is those precious promises whereby we are made partakers of the divine nature, by flying the corruptions that are in the world through lust (2 Pet. i. 4); this is the fruit of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God; this is the white stone wherein there is a name written, which no man knoweth, save he that receiveth it. This is the morning star, this is the new name, the name of God, the name of the City of God; the new Jerusalem which descendeth from God out of heaven; this is the hidden manna, that white clothing, eye salve and gold, and that heavenly supper which Christ promiseth to them that overcome (Rev. ii. 7, 17, 18, and iii. 5, 12, 18, 20).

43. That there are three which bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and that these three are one in testimony, witnessing the resurrection of Christ. The Father saith, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee (Acts xiii. 33-35). The Son testifieth of His own resurrection being forty days with His disciples (Acts i. 3). The Holy Ghost testifieth the same, whom Christ sent to His disciples upon the day of Pentecost (Acts ii.).

44. That every person that is regenerate and risen again with Christ hath these three aforesaid witnesses in himself (1 John v. 10); for Christ doth dwell in his heart by faith (Eph. iii. 17); and the Father dwelleth with the Son (John xiv. 23); and the Holy Ghost likewise (1 Cor. iii. 16); and that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost is with them (2 Cor. xiii. 13).

45. That Christ, having forty days after His resurrection conversed with His disciples (Acts i. 3), ascended locally into the heavens (Acts i. 9), which must contain Him unto the time that all things be restored (Acts iii. 21).

That they which are risen with Christ, ascend up spiritually with Him, seeking those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God, and that they set their affections on heavenly things, and not on earthly things (Col. iii. 1-5).

46. That Christ, now being received into heaven, sitteth at the right hand of God (Mark. xvi. 9), having led captivity captive, and given gifts unto men (Eph. iv. 8); that God hath now highly exalted Him, and given Him a name above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, in

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earth and under the earth (Phil. ii. 9, 10), that he hath obtained all power both in heaven and in earth (Matt. xxviii. 18), and hath made all things subject under His feet, and hath appointed Him over all things to be the head to the church, that is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all things (Eph. i. 22-23).

47. That the regenerate do sit together with Christ Jesus in heavenly places (Eph. ii. 6), that they sit with Him in His throne as He sitteth with the Father in His throne (Rev. iii. 21), that they have power over nations, and rule them with a rod of iron, and as a potter's vessel they are broken in pieces (Rev. ii. 26, 27); and that, sitting on twelve thrones, they do judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. xix. 28), which spiritually is to put all their enemies in subjection under their feet, so that the evil one doth not touch them (1 John v. 18), nor the gates of hell prevail against them (Matt. xvi. 28), and that they are become pillars in the house of God, and go no more out (Rev. iii. 12).

48. That Christ Jesus being exalted at the right hand of God the Father, far above all principalities and powers, might, and domination, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but in the world to come (Eph. i. 21), hath received of His Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, which He also shed forth upon His disciples on the Day of Pentecost (Acts. ii. 33).

49. That Christ Jesus, in His resurrection, ascension, and exaltation, is more and rather Lord and Christ, Saviour, anointed, and King, than in His humiliation, sufferings and death (Acts ii. 36; Phil. ii. 7, 11), for the end is more excellent than the means, and His sufferings were the way by the which He entered into His glory (Luke xxiv. 16), and so by consequent the efficacy of His resurrection in the new creature is more noble and excellent than the efficacy of His death in the mortification and remission of sins.

50. That the knowledge of Christ according to the flesh is of small profit (2 Cor. v. 16, 17), and the knowledge of Christ's genealogy and history is no other but that which the Devil hath as well if not better than any man living; but the knowledge of Christ according to the spirit is effectual to salvation, which is spiritually to be grafted to the similitude of Christ's birth, life, miracles, doings, sufferings, death, burial, resurrection, ascension and exaltation (Rom. vi. 3, 6).

51. That Christ Jesus, according to the flesh and history in His doings and suffering, is a great mystery, and divine sacrament

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of Himself, and of His ministry in the spirit, and of those spiritual things which He worketh in those which are to be heirs of salvation (Rom. vi. 3, 6; Eph. ii. 5, 6), and that spiritually He performeth all those miracles in the regenerate which He wrought in His flesh; He healeth their leprosy, bloody issue, blindness, dumbness, deafness, lameness, palsy, fever, He casteth out the devils and unclean spirits, He raiseth the dead, rebuketh the winds and the sea, and it is calm; He feedeth thousands with the barley loaves and fishes (Matt. viii. 16, 17, compared with Isaiah liii. 4, John vi. 26, 27).

52. That the Holy Ghost proceedeth from the Father and the Son (John xiv. 26, and xvi. 7); that He is the eternal spirit, whereby Christ offered himself without spot to God (Heb. ix. 14); that He is that other comforter, which Christ asketh, obtaineth, and sendeth from the Father (John xiv. 16), which dwelleth in the regenerate (1 Cor. iii. 16), which leadeth them into all truth (John xvi. 13), He is that anointing which teacheth them all things, and that they have no need that any man teach them, but as the same anointing teacheth (1 John ii. 20, 27).

53. That although there be divers gifts of the Spirit yet there is but one Spirit, which distributeth to every one as He will (1 Cor. xii. 4, 11; Eph. iv. 4), that the outward gifts of the spirit which the Holy Ghost poureth forth upon the Day of Pentecost upon the disciples, in tongues and prophecy, and gifts, and healing, and miracles, which is called the Baptism of the Holy Ghost and fire (Acts i. 5), were only a figure of and an hand leading to better things, even the most proper gifts of the spirit of sanctification, which is the new creature; which is the one baptism (Eph. iv. 4, compared with Acts ii. 33, 38, and with Luke x. 17, 20).

54. That John Baptist and Christ are two persons, their ministries are two ministries several, and their baptisms are two baptisms, distinct the one from the other (John i. 20; Acts xiii. 25; Acts i. 4, 5; Matt. iii. 11).

55. That John taught the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, baptizing with water to amendment of life (Matt. iii. 11), thus preparing a way for Christ and His baptism (Luke iii. 3, 6), by bringing men to repentance and faith in the Messiah, whom he pointed out with the finger (saying), behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world (John i. 31, 29; Act xix. 4).

56. That Christ is stronger, and hath a more excellent office



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and ministry than John (Matt. iii. 11); that He baptizeth with the Holy Ghost and fire; that He cometh and walketh in the way which John hath prepared; and that the new creature followeth repentance (Luke iii. 6).

57. That repentance and faith in the Messias are the conditions to be performed on our behalf, for the obtaining of the promises (Acts ii. 38; John i. 12); that the circumcision of the heart, mortification and the promise of the spirit, that is, the new creature, are the promises which are made to the aforesaid conditions (Deut. xxx. 6; Acts ii. 38; Gal. iii. 14; 2 Pet. i. 4, 5), which promises are all yea and Amen in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. i. 20), and that in the regenerate (Gal. iii. 16).

58. That repentance and faith are wrought in the hearts of men by the preaching of the word, outwardly in the Scriptures and creatures, the grace of God preventing us by the motions and instinct of the spirit, which a man hath power to receive or reject (Matt. xxiii. 37; Acts vii. 51; Acts vi. 10; Rom. x. 14, 18); that our justification before God consisteth not in the performance of the conditions which God requireth of us, but in the partaking of the promises, the possessing of Christ, remission of sins, and the new creature.

59. That God the Father, of His own good will doth beget us by the word of truth (James i. 18), which is an immortal seed (1 Pet. i. 23), not the doctrine of repentance and faith which may be lost (Luke viii. 13); and that God the Father, in our regeneration, neither needeth nor useth the help of any creature, but that the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost immediately worketh that work in the soul, where the free will of men can do nothing (John i. 13).

60. That such as have not attained the new creature have need of the scriptures, creatures and ordinances of the Church, to instruct them, to comfort them, to stir them up the better to perform the condition of repentance to the remission of sins (2 Pet. i. 19; 1 Cor. xi. 26; Eph. iv. 12—23).

61. That the new creature which is begotten of God needeth not the outward scriptures, creatures, or ordinances of the church, to support or help them (1 Cor. xiii. 10, 12; 1 Joh. ii. 27; 1 Cor. i. 15, 16; Rev. xxi. 23), seeing that he hath three witnesses in himself, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: which are better than all scriptures, or creatures whatsoever.



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62. That as Christ who was above the law notwithstanding was made under the law, for our cause : so the regenerate in love to others can and will do no other, than use the outward things of the church for the gaining and supporting of others : and so the outward church and ordinances are always necessary, for all sorts of persons whatsoever (Matt. iii. 15 ; xxviii. 19, 20 ; 1 Cor. viii. 9).

63. That the new creature although he be above the law and scriptures, yet he can do nothing against the law or scriptures, but rather all his doings shall serve to the confirming and establishing of the law (Rom. iii. 31). Therefore he can neither lie, nor steal, nor commit adultery, nor kill, nor hate any man, or do any other fleshly action, and therefore all fleshly libertinism is contrary to regeneration, detestable, and damnable (John viii. 34, Rom. vi. 15, 16, 18 ; 2 Pet. ii. 18, 19 ; 1 John v. 18).

64. That the outward church visible, consists of penitent persons only, and of such as believing in Christ bring forth fruits worthy amendment of life (1 Tim. vi. 3, 5 ; 2 Tim. iii. 1, 5 ; Acts xix. 4).<sup>1</sup>

65. That the visible church is a mystical figure outwardly of the true, spiritual invisible church ; which consisteth of the spirits of just and perfect men only, that is of the regenerate (Rev. i. 20, compared with Rev. xxi. 2, 23, 27).

66. That repentance is the change of the mind from evil to that which is good (Matt. iii. 2), a sorrow for sin committed, with a humble heart for the same ; and a resolution to amend for the time to come ; with an unfeigned endeavour therein (2 Cor. vii. 8. 11 ; Isaiah i. 16, 17 ; Jer. xxxi. 18, 19).

67. That when we have done all that we can we are unprofitable servants, and all our righteousness is as a stained cloth (Luke xvii. 20), and that we can only suppress and lop off the branches of sins, but the root of sin we cannot pluck up out of our hearts (Jer. iv. 4, compared with Deut. xxx. 6, 8).

<sup>1</sup> In the earlier draft of this Confession the possibility of hypocrites finding their way into church fellowship is admitted in this Conclusion, which runs thus : "That the outward and visible church consists of regenerated and believing men, as much as men can judge thereof, who bring forth fruits worthy amendment of life, although hypocrites and feigners are often hidden among the repenting." Evans' *Early Baptists*, i., p. 267.

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68. That faith is a knowledge in the mind of the doctrine of the law and gospel contained in the prophetic and apostolical scriptures of the Old and New Testament, accompanying repentance; with an assurance that God, through Christ, will perform unto us His promises of remission of sins, and mortification, upon the condition of our unfeigned repentance, and amendment of life (Rom. x. 13, 14, 15; Acts v. 30-32, and Acts ii. 38, 39; Heb. xi. 1; Mark i. 15).

69. That all penitent and faithful Christians are brethren in the communion of the outward church, wheresoever they live, by what name soever they are known,<sup>1</sup> which in truth and zeal follow repentance and faith, though compassed with never so many ignorances and infirmities; and we salute them all with a holy kiss, being heartily grieved that we which follow after one faith, and one spirit, one Lord, and one God, one body, and one baptism, should be rent into so many sects and schisms; and that only for matters of less moment.

70. That the outward baptism of water is to be administered only upon such penitent and faithful persons as are (aforesaid), and not upon innocent infants, or wicked persons (Matt. iii. 2, 3, compared with Matt. xxviii. 19, 20 and John iv. 1).

71. That in Baptism to the penitent person, and believer, there is presented, and figured, the spiritual baptism of Christ, (that is) the baptism of the Holy Ghost and fire: the baptism into the death and resurrection of Christ: even the promise of the Spirit, which he shall assuredly be made partaker of, if he continue to the end (Gal. iii. 14; Matt. iii. 11; 1 Cor. xii. 13; Rom. vi. 3, 6; Col. ii. 10).

72. That in the outward supper which only baptized persons must partake, there is presented and figured, before the eyes of the penitent and faithful, that spiritual supper, which Christ maketh of His flesh and blood which is crucified and shed for the remission of sins (as the bread is broken and the wine poured forth), and which is eaten and drunken (as is the bread and wine bodily) only by those which are flesh of His flesh, and bone of His bone: in the communion of the same spirit (1 Cor. xii. 13; Rev. iii. 20, compared with 1 Cor. xi. 23, 26; John vi. 53, 58).

<sup>1</sup> The earlier draft added here the words: "be they Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Zwinglians, Calvinists, Brownists, Anabaptists, or any other pious Christians." *Ibid.*, p. 267.

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73. That the outward baptism and supper do not confer and convey grace and regeneration to the participants or communicants; but as the word preached, they serve only to support and stir up the repentance and faith of the communicants till Christ come, till the day dawn, and the day-star arise in their hearts (1 Cor. xi. 26; 2 Peter i. 19; 1 Cor. i. 5-8).

74. That the sacraments have the same use that the word hath; that they are a visible word, and that they teach to the eye of them that understand as the word teacheth the ears of them that have ears to hear (Prov. xx. 12), and therefore as the word appertaineth not to infants, no more do the sacraments.

75. That the preaching of the word, and ministry of the sacraments, representeth the ministry of Christ in the spirit; who teacheth, baptizeth, and feedeth the regenerate, by the Holy Spirit inwardly and invisibly.

76. That Christ hath set in His outward church two sorts of ministers: viz., some who are called pastors, teachers or elders, who administer in the word and sacraments, and others who are called deacons, men and women: whose ministry is, to serve tables and wash the saints' feet (Acts vi. 2-4; Phil. i. 1; 1 Tim. iii. 2, 3, 8, 11, and chap. v).<sup>1</sup>

77. That the separating of the impenitent, from the outward communion of the Church, is a figure of the eternal rejection and reprobation of them that persist impenitent in sin (Rev. xxi. 27, and xxiii. 14-15, Matt. xvi. 18 and xviii. 18; John xx. 23, compared with Rev. iii. 12).

78. That none are to be separated from the outward communion of the Church but such as forsake repentance, which deny the power of Godliness (2 Tim. iii. 5). [and namely that sufficient admonition go before, according to the rule (Matt. xviii. 15-18),] and that none are to be rejected for ignorance or errors, or infirmities so long as they retain repentance and faith in Christ (Rom. xiv., and 1 Thess. v. 14; Rom. xvi. 17, 18), but they are to be instructed with meekness; and the strong are to bear the infirmities of the weak; and that we are to support one another through love.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The religious practice of feet-washing according to the example and command of Jesus (John xiii., 14-15) was observed by the General Baptists of Kent and Sussex.

<sup>2</sup> The words in brackets were not in the earlier draft, they are designed to make the exercise of discipline more brotherly and less preemptory.

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79. That a man may speak a word against the Son, and be pardoned, (that is) a man may err in the knowledge of Christ's History, and in matters of the outward church, and be forgiven, doing it in an ignorant zeal; but he that speaketh a word against the Holy Ghost (that is) that after illumination forsaketh repentance and faith in Christ, persecuting them, trampling under foot the blood of the covenant; returning with the dog to the vomit; that such shall never be pardoned, neither in this world, nor in the world to come (Matt. xii. 31, 32, compared with Hebrews vi. 4, and chap. x. 26-29; 2 Pet. ii. 20, 22).

80. That persons separated from the communion of the church, are to be accounted as heathens and publicans (Matt. xviii. 17), and that they are so far to be shunned, as they may pollute: notwithstanding being ready to instruct them, and to relieve them in their wants; seeking by all lawful means to win them; considering that excommunication is only for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord (1 Cor. v. 5, 11; Matt. xi. 19; Luke xv. 1, 2).

81. That there is no succession in the outward church, but that all the succession is from heaven, and that the new creature only hath the thing signified, and substance, whereof the outward church and ordinances are shadows (Col. ii. 16, 17), and therefore he alone hath power, and knoweth aright, how to administer in the outward church, for the benefit of others (John vi. 45); yet God is not the God of confusion but of order, and therefore we are in the outward church to draw as near the first institution as may be, in all things (1 Cor. xiv. 33); therefore it is not lawful for every brother to administer the word and sacraments (Eph. iv. 11, 12, compared with 1 Cor. xii. 4, 5, 6, 28, 29).<sup>1</sup>

82. That Christ hath set in his outward church the vocation of master and servant, parents and children, husband and wife (Eph. v. 22-25, chap. vi. 1, 4, 5, 9), and hath commanded every soul to be subject to the higher powers (Rom. xiii. 1), not because of wrath only, but for conscience' sake (verse 5) that we are to give them their duty, as tribute and custom, honour and fear, not speaking evil of them that are in authority (Jude, verse 8), but praying and giving thanks for them (1 Tim. ii. 1, 2), for that is acceptable in the sight of God, even our Saviour.

<sup>1</sup> The earlier copy added here "except those only who are called and ordained to it." *Ibid.*, p. 269.

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83. That the office of the magistrate, is a disposition or permissive ordinance of God<sup>1</sup> for the good of mankind: that one man like the brute beasts devour not another (Rom. xiii.), and that justice and civility may be preserved among men: and that a magistrate may so please God in his calling, in doing that which is righteous and just in the eyes of the Lord, that he may bring an outward blessing upon himself, his posterity and subjects (2 Kings, x. 30, 31).

84. That the magistrate is not by virtue of his office to meddle with religion, or matters of conscience, to force and compel men to this or that form of religion or doctrine; but to leave Christian religion free, to every man's conscience, and to handle only civil transgressions (Rom. xiii.), injuries and wrongs of man against man, in murder, adultery, theft, etc., for Christ only is the king, and lawgiver of the church and conscience (James iv. 12).

85. That if the magistrate will follow Christ, and be His disciple, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Christ; he must love his enemies and not kill them, he must pray for them, and not punish them, he must feed them and give them drink, not imprison them, banish them, dismember them, and spoil their goods; he must suffer persecution and affliction with Christ, and be slandered, reviled, blasphemed, scourged, buffeted, spit upon, imprisoned and killed with Christ; and that by the authority of magistrates, which things he cannot possibly do, and retain the revenge of the sword.

86. That the Disciples of Christ, the members of the outward church, are to judge all their causes of difference among themselves, and they are not to go to law before the magistrates (1 Cor. vi. 1. 7.), and that all their differences must be ended by (yea) and (nay) without an oath (Matt. v. 33-37; James v. 12).

87. That the Disciples of Christ, the members of the outward church, may not marry any of the profane, or wicked, godless people of the world, but that every one is to marry in the Lord (1 Cor. vii. 39), every man one only wife and every woman one only husband (1 Cor. vii. 2).

88. That parents are bound to bring up their children in

<sup>1</sup> The earlier draft inserted here the words "*or an ordinance of man* (1 Pet ii. 13; 1 Sam. v. 22) *which God has permitted,*" which approaches the Mennonite view of magistracy.



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instruction and information of the Lord (Eph. vi. 4), and that they are to provide for their family: otherwise they deny the faith, and are worse than infidels (1 Tim. v. 8).

89. That notwithstanding if the Lord shall give a man any special calling, as Simon, and Andrew, James, and John, then they must leave all, father, ship, nets, wife, children, yea, and life also to follow Christ (Luke xiv. 26; Matt. iv. 18-20).

90. That in the necessities of the church, and poor brethren, all things are to be common (Acts iv. 32), yea and that one church is to administer to another in time of need (Gal. ii. 10; Acts xi. 30; 2 Cor. viii. and chap. ix.).

91. That all the bodies of all men that are dead, shall by the power of Christ, be raised up, out of his own proper seed, as corn out of the seed rotting in the earth (1 Cor. xv.).

92. That these which live in the last day shall not die, but shall be changed in a moment; in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet (1 Cor. xv. 52), for the trump shall blow, and the dead shall be raised up incorruptible, and we shall be changed, not in substance but in qualities; for the bodies shall rise in honour, in power, in incorruption, and spiritual; being sown in dishonour, in weakness, in corruption, and natural (1 Cor. xv. 42, 44).

93. That the bodies, being raised up, shall be joined to the souls, whereto formerly they were united; which till that time were preserved in the hands of the Lord (Rev. vi. 9, Job. xix. 25-27).

94. That it is appointed to all men that they shall once die, and then cometh the judgment (Heb. ix. 27), and that the change of them that live on the earth at the last day, shall be as it were a death unto them (1 Cor. xv. 52; 1 Thes. iv. 15-17).

95. That there shall be a general and universal day of judgment, when everyone shall receive according to the things that are done in the flesh, whether they be good or evil (2 Cor. v. 10; Acts xvii. 31).

96. That of that day and hour knoweth no man; no, not the Angels in heaven, neither the Son Himself, but the Father only (Mark xiii. 32).

97. That Christ Jesus that man, shall be judge in that day (Acts xvii. 31), that he shall come in the clouds with glory; and all His holy angels with Him (Matt. xxv.), with a shout, and with



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the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God (1 Thes. iv. 16), and He shall sit upon the throne of His glory; and all nations shall be gathered before Him, and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats, setting the sheep on His right hand and the goats on the left (Matt. xxv.).

98. That the king shall say to the sheep, the regenerate, which are on His right hand, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world;" and it shall be performed accordingly (Matt. xxv.).

99. That the king shall say to them on His left hand, the goats, the wicked ones, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels," and it shall be accomplished accordingly (Matt. xxv.).

100. That after the judgment ended and accomplished, and the last enemy, that is death, being put under the feet of Christ, then the Son Himself shall deliver up the kingdom into the hands of the Father, and shall be subject unto Him, that subdued all things unto Him, that God may be all in all (1 Cor. xv. 24-28).

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## The Last Booke of Iohn Smith, CALLED THE RETRACTATION OF HIS ERROURS, AND THE CONFIRMATION OF THE TRUTH

*"If any man be in Christ, let him be a new creature." (2 Cor. v. 17.)*  
*"For they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and the lusts." (Gal. v. 24.)*

I am not of the number of those men which assume unto themselves such plenary knowledge and assurance of their ways, and of the perfection and sufficiency thereof, as that they peremptorily censure all men except those of their own understanding, and require that all men upon pain of damnation become subject and captivate in their judgment and walking to their line and level: of which sort are those of our English nation, who publish in print their proclamation against all Churches except those of their own society and fellowship—I mean the double separation Master Hainsworth and Master Helwys—although the one more near the truth than the other; neither is my purpose, in this my

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writing, to accuse and condemn other men, but to censure and reform myself. If I should walk with either of the double separation, I must, from the persuasion of mine own alone perfect reformation, reprove all other, and reject them as short of that mark whereto I were come : and I must shut my ears from hearing any instruction which others may afford me ; for this is the quintessence of the separation, to assume unto themselves a prerogative to teach all men, and to be taught of no man. Now I have in all my writings hitherto received instruction of others, and professed my readiness to be taught by others, and therefore have I so oftentimes been accused of inconstancy ; well, let them think of me as they please, I profess I have changed, and shall be ready still to change for the better : and if it be their glory to be peremptory and immutable in their articles of religion, they may enjoy that glory without my envy, though not without the grief of my heart for them.

The Articles of Religion which are the ground of my salvation are these, wherein I differ from no good Christian : That Jesus Christ, the son of God and the son of Mary, is the anointed King, Priest and Prophet of the Church, the only mediator of the New Testament, and that through true repentance and faith in Him, who alone is our Saviour, we receive remission of sins and the Holy Ghost in this life, and therewith all the redemption of our bodies, and everlasting life in the resurrection of the body ; and whosoever walketh according to this rule, I must needs acknowledge him my brother ; yea, although he differ from me in divers other particulars.

And howsoever in the days of my blind zeal and preposterous imitation of Christ, I was somewhat lavish in censuring and judging others and namely, in the way of separation called Brownism, yet since having been instructed in the way of the Lord more perfectly, and finding my error therein, I protest against that my former course of censuring other persons, and especially for all those hard phrases wherewith I have in any of my writings inveighed against either England or the Separation. For England, although I cannot with any good conscience acknowledge the wicked ones mingled with the zealous professors in one congregation to be the true outward visible Church which Christ and His Apostles at the first instituted, which consisted only of penitent persons and believers ; yet therefore to say that the zealous professors themselves are antichristian, is a censure

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such as I cannot justify before the Lord, who is my judge in my conscience. And therefore I utterly revoke and renounce it. Again, howsoever I doubt not but it is an error of the forward professors of the English churches to be mingled with the open wicked in the supper of the Lord, as they daily are, seeing therein they do transgress the first institution of Christ, who ate His supper only with the eleven (for Judas departed so soon as he had received the sop of the Passover), yet I cannot therefore conclude the said forward professors under the same judgment, or fellowship of sin, with the wicked ones with whom they partake the supper. Yea, rather I do also renounce that evil and perverse judgment which I have pronounced in my writings, in this particular acknowledging my error therein. Further I must needs avouch that the Bishops of the land grievously sin against God and the forward professors in ruling them so rigorously, urging their subscription, canons, and ceremonies upon men's consciences upon pain of excommunication, deposition, silence, imprisonment, banishment, and the like penalties : and that therein they sit as Antichrist in the temple of God, which is the conscience. Yet, therefore, to say that all the professors of the land, whether preachers or others that remain under their jurisdiction, do submit unto the beast and receive his mark, that I dare not avouch and justify as I have done, for I doubt not but many touch none of their unclean things, but only submit to Christ so far as they are enlightened ; and if a sin of ignorance make a man an anti-christian, then I demand where shall we find a Christian. In these three particulars, especially have I transgressed against the professors of the English nation. Generally, all those biting and bitter words, phrases, and speeches used against the professors of the land I utterly retract and revoke, as not being of the spirit of Christ, but of the Disciples, who would have called for fire and brimstone from heaven, which Christ rebuketh. Particularly that book<sup>1</sup> against Master Bernard, wherein Master Marbury, Master White, and others are mentioned and cruelly taxed, I retract, not for that it is wholly false, but for that it is

<sup>1</sup> *Paralleles, Censures, and Observations*, 1609. In the preface to this work Smith charged Bernard, Thomas Whyte, and Enoch Clapham with being "most fearful Apostates." He referred to Francis Merbury, minister of Northampton, as one who had "now fallen to his gracious Lords," i.e., to the bishops, p. 135.

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wholly censorious and critical : and for that therein the contention for outward matters, which are of inferior note, hath broken the rules of love and charity, which is the superior law.

Now for the Separation, I cannot, nor dare not, in my conscience before the Judge of the whole world justify my writings and dealings against them. For the truth of the matter I doubt not but it is on my side, but the manner of writing is that alone wherein I have failed : for I should have with the spirit of meekness instructed them that are contrary minded, but my words have been stout and mingled with gall, and therefore hath the Lord repayed me home full measure into my bosom, for according to that measure wherewith I measured hath it been measured again unto me, by Master Clifton, especially by Master Hainsworth and Master Bernard. The Lord lay none of our sins to the charge of any of us all, but He of His mercy pass by them : for my part the Lord hath taught me thereby, for hereafter shall I set a watch before my mouth, that I sin not again in that kind and degree. For Master Hainsworth's book, I acknowledge that I erred in the place of the candlestick and altar, but that of the altar is not Master Fenner's error with me, but mine rather with him ; for other things, namely, the chief matter in controversy I hold as I did. Yea, which is more, I say that although it be lawful to pray, preach, and sing out of a book for all penitent persons, yet a man regenerate is above all books and scriptures whatsoever, seeing he hath the spirit of God within him, which teacheth him the true meaning of the scriptures, without the which spirit the scriptures are but a dead letter, which is perverted and misconstrued as we see at this day to contrary ends and senses ; and that to bind a regenerate man to a book in praying, preaching or singing, is to set the Holy Ghost to school in the one as well as in the other.

For the other question of elders with Master Hainsworth, and of Baptism with Master Clifton, and the two Testaments, I hold as I did, and therein I am persuaded I have the truth. If any man say, why then do you not answer the books written in opposition, my answer is, my desire is to end controversies among Christians rather than to make and maintain them, especially in matters of the outward Church and ceremonies ; and it is the grief of my heart that I have so long cumbered myself and spent my time therein, and I profess that difference in judgment for matter of circumstance, as are all things of the outward Church, shall not

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cause me to refuse the brotherhood of any penitent and faithful Christian whatsoever. And now from this day forward do I put an end to all controversies and questions about the outward Church and ceremonies with all men, and resolve to spend my time in the main matters wherein consisteth salvation. Without repentance, faith, remission of sin, and the new creature, there is no salvation—but there is salvation without the truth of all the outward ceremonies of the outward Church. If any man say, you answer not because you cannot, I say to him, that I am accounted one that cannot answer is not my fame, but to spend my time in a full answer of those things of the outward Church which I am bound to employ better (necessity calling upon me) would be my sin, and so I had rather be accounted unable to answer, than to be found in sin against my conscience. Again, if I should answer, it would breed further strife among Christians—further, we have no means to publish our writings. But my first answer satisfieth my conscience, and so I rest, having peace at home in this point.

But<sup>1</sup> now to come to Master Helwys, his separation, against which I have done nothing in writing hitherto, notwithstanding I am now bound in conscience to publish an apology of certain imputations cast upon me by him in his writings. As first, the sin against the Holy Ghost, because I have denied some truth which once I acknowledged, and wherewith I was enlightened. Than this can there be no more grievous imputation cast upon any man; than this can there be no higher degree of censuring.

What shall I say here for my apology? Shall I say that my heart yet appertaineth to the Lord, that I daily seek mercy and ask forgiveness, that I labour to reform myself wherein I see my error, that I continually search after the truth and endeavour myself to keep a good conscience in all things? But this, haply, will not satisfy Master Helwys. Well, let us examine the points wherein I have forsaken the truth: Succession is the matter

<sup>1</sup> Smith here replies to charges made against him by Helwys in his *Declaration of Faith*, 1611, and reiterated in his *Advertisement unto the New Fryesers* later in the same year. Helwys gives a list of errors into which he thought Smith had fallen. He says Smith now taught “that the Church and ministry must come by succession, contrary to his former profession in words and writings, and *that* by a supposed succession he cannot shew from whom nor when nor where.” *Declaration*, Sig. B.



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wherein I hold as I have written to Master Bernard, that succession is abolished by the Church of Rome, and that there is no true ministry derived from the Apostles through the Church of Rome to England, but that the succession is interrupted and broken off. Secondly, I hold, as I did hold then, succession being broken off and interrupted, it may by two or three gathered together in the name of Christ be renewed and assumed again; and herein there is no difference between Master Helwys and me. Thirdly, Master Helwys said that although there be churches already established, ministers ordained, and sacraments administered orderly, yet men are not bound to join those former churches established, but may, being as yet unbaptized, baptize themselves (as we did) and proceed to build churches of themselves, disorderly (as I take it). Herein I differ from Master Helwys, and therefore he saith I have sinned against the Holy Ghost because I once acknowledged the truth (as Master Helwys calleth it).

Here I answer three things :—“ 1. I did never acknowledge it. 2. It is not the truth. 3. Though I had acknowledged it, and it were a truth, yet in denying it I have not sinned against the Holy Ghost.

First, I did never acknowledge it, that it was lawful for private persons to baptize when there were true churches and ministers from whence we might have our baptism without sin, as there are forty witnesses that can testify : only this is it which I held, that seeing there was no church to whom we could join with a good conscience, to have baptism from them, therefore we might baptize ourselves. That this is so the Lord knoweth, my conscience witnesseth, and Master Helwys himself will not deny it.

Secondly, it is not the truth that two or three private persons may baptize, when there is a true church and ministers established whence baptism may orderly be had : for if Christ himself did fetch His baptism from John, and the Gentiles from the Jews baptized, and if God be the God of order and not of confusion, then surely we must observe this order now, or else disorder is order, and God alloweth disorder ; for if Master Helwys' position be true, that every two or three that see the truth of baptism may begin to baptize, and need not join to former true churches where they may have their baptism orderly from ordained ministers, then the order of the primitive church was order for



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them and those times only, and this disorder will establish baptism of private persons. Yea of women from henceforth to the world's end, as Master Helwys his ground doth evidently afford to him that will scan it.

Thirdly, though I had acknowledged that assertion of Master Helwys, and it were the truth, and I now forsake it, it doth not thereupon follow that a man sinneth against the Holy Ghost: for I demand, may not a man forsake a truth upon a temptation, and obtain remission upon repentance? Did not Peter so in denying Christ? Did not David so, and continued impenitent till the child was born after adultery with Bethshabe? A man therefore that upon a temptation forsaketh a known truth, may repent and receive mercies—further, may not a man (as he supposeth) upon force of argument, yield from the known truth to error for conscience sake? Have all those sinned against the Holy Ghost that have separated from England and are returned again? Certainly Master Helwys herein erreth not a little, and breaketh the bond of charity above all men that I ever read or heard, in uttering so sharp a censure upon so weak a ground.<sup>1</sup> Besides, the sin against the Holy Ghost is not in outward ceremonies, but in matter of substance, which is the knowledge of the truth (Heb. vi. 1—10), namely a forsaking of repentance and faith in Christ, and falling to profaneness and Paganism: for I hold no part of saving righteousness to consist in outward ceremonies, for they are only as a crutch for the lame and weak to walk withal till they be cured. Concerning succession, briefly thus much: I deny all succession except in the truth; and I hold we are not to violate the order of the primitive church, except necessity urge a dispensation; and therefore it is not lawful for every one that seeth the truth to baptize, for then there might be as many churches as couples in the world, and none have anything to do with other, which breaketh the bond of love and brotherhood in churches; but, in these outward matters, I dare not any more contend with any man, but desire that we may follow the truth of repentance, faith,

<sup>1</sup> "They were once enlightened and had tasted of the heavenly gift and were made partakers of the holy ghost and had tasted of the good word of God and of the powers of the world to come and are fallen away; it is impossible they should be renewed again by repentance seeing they crucify again to themselves the son of God and make a mock of him." Helwys' *Admonition*, 1611, p. 34.

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and regeneration, and lay aside dissension for mint, comine, and annis seed.

Another imputation of Master Helwys is concerning the flesh of Christ. Whereto I say, that he that knoweth not that the first and second flesh of an infant in the mother's womb are to be distinguished, knoweth not the grounds of nature and natural reason. I affirmed concerning Christ that His second flesh, that is His nourishment, He had from His mother, and that the Scriptures are plain for it; but, concerning the first matter of Christ's flesh, whence it was, I said thus much: That, although I yield it to be a truth in nature that He had it of His mother Mary, yet I dare not make it such an Article of faith as that if any man will not consent unto it, I should refuse brotherhood with him: and that the Scriptures do not lead us (as far as I conceive) to the searching of that point, whereof Christ's natural flesh was made; but that we should search into Christ's spiritual flesh, to be made flesh of that His flesh, and bone of His bone, in the communion and fellowship of the same spirit. That this was my speech and the sum of my assertion concerning this point, I call the Lord and all that heard as witnesses; whereby appeareth Master Helwys his partiality in reporting this particular.

Concerning a secret imputation<sup>1</sup> which Master Helwys, by way of intimation, suggesteth, as though I had received much help of maintenance from his company, or from that company of English people that came over together out of the north parts with me, I affirm thus much: That I never received of them all put together the value of forty shillings to my knowledge, since I came out of England, and of Master Helwys not the value of a penny; but it is well known to Master Helwys and to all the company, that I have spent as much in helping the poor as Master Helwys hath done, and it is not known that Master Helwys hath spent one penny but I have spent another in any common burthen for the relieving of the poor. All that ever Master Helwys can say is that, when I was sick in England, at Bashforth, I was troublesome and chargeable to him; wherein I confess his kindness, but

<sup>1</sup> Helwys made such an imputation in the postscript to his *Mystery of Iniquity*, 1612, p. 205. "We have been misled . . . by deceitful hearted leaders who flee into foreign countries and free states and draw people after them to support their kingdoms."

## Confirmations

I would have given him satisfaction, and he refused it, and in my sickness there was as much brought in as I spent.

Another imputation is of some moment, that I should affirm Christ in the flesh to be a figure of Himself in the spirit, and that men are not so much to strive<sup>1</sup> about the natural flesh of Christ as about His spiritual flesh ; and that the contention concerning the natural flesh of Christ is like the contention of the soldiers for Christ's coat. True, this I did affirm, and this I defend as the most excellent and comfortable truth in the Scriptures : for who knoweth not, that to know and be made conformable to the similitude of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection in the mortification of sin and the new creature, to be made flesh of His flesh and bone of His bone, spiritually in the fellowship of one holy anointing, which is Christ's spiritual flesh ; who knoweth not, I say, that this is better than the knowledge of Christ's natural flesh. That Christ's natural flesh is a figure of Christ's spiritual flesh, is plain by Rom. vi. where the Apostle saith that we must be grafted to the similitude of His death, burial, and resurrection ; if His death, burial, and resurrection be a similitude or figure, so is His body that died, was buried, and rose again. The like saith the Apostle, Heb. iv. 15, that Christ was tempted in all things in a figure or similitude ; but this point is also plain enough, that all Christ's miracles and doings in the flesh, with His sufferings, are figures of those heavenly things which He in the spirit worketh in the regenerate ; He cleanseth their leprosy, casteth out the devil, drieth up the bloody issue, rideth to Jerusalem on an ass, stilleth the winds and sea, feedeth the multitude : for Jesus Christ is yesterday and to-day, and the same also for ever. If this be a truth, then, the contention about Christ's natural flesh is in comparison like to the soldiers' contention for His coat. It is the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing, saith Christ, and so I rest satisfied in this particular. Concerning the—<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "He hath taught that Christs miracles, sufferings, and death, yea his hanging upon the Cross were all typical and carnal, comparing Christ's flesh to his garments, and therefore not to be striven about." *Helwys' Admonition*, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> This section closes abruptly as printed, but the last two words were probably intended to form part of the title of the next piece, "Concerning the life and death of John Smith."

# The Life and Death

## THE LIFE AND DEATH OF JOHN SMITH

*"The righteous perisheth and no man considereth it in heart, and merciful men are taken away, and no man understandeth that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come."—Isaiah lvii. 1, 2.*

*"Then I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, write the dead which die in the Lord are fully blessed : even so saith the spirit for they rest from their labours, and their works follow them.—Rev. xiv. 13.*

After a certain time (living at Amsterdam) he began to practise physic<sup>1</sup> (knowing that a man was bound to use the gifts that the Lord had bestowed upon him for the good of others), in administering whereof he usually took nothing of the poorer sort; and if they were rich he took but half as much as other doctors did: excepting some, who being well able and well minded, urged more upon him; some demanding of him why he took no more, alleging that he must pay his house-rent, maintain his wife and children. He answered, you must give me leave herein to use my conscience. Moreover he was so mindful and so careful for the poor, that he would rather live sparingly in his house (or as we say) neglect himself, his wife and children, than that any should be in extremity. Upon a time, seeing one slenderly apparelled, he sent them his gown, to make them clothes. It being refused (saying that their wants was not so great as he supposed), he answered, that if they did refuse it the fault should be upon themselves, for he was willing to give it, and that it was but his duty, according to that speech in the gospel, "He that hath two coats, let him part with him that hath none." So that he was well beloved of most men, and hated of none save a few of our English nation, who had nothing against him but that he differed from them in some points of religion; notwithstanding he would beseech the Lord to open their eyes to see better, and to forgive them their sins: and he was ready to help any of them as occasion was offered him.

<sup>1</sup> I wonder whether John Smith was in any way connected with the founder of the Lincoln Bluecoat School, who described himself in his will, November, 1602, as "Richard Smith Doctor in Physicke late of London but now of Welton, near Lincoln." I have traced one nephew of this doctor, named John Smith, a clergyman, whose wife's name was Mary, but he died early in 1603 at Binbrook, St. Mary, co. Lincoln. A manuscript commonplace book of John Smith's colleague, Samuel Ward, in the library of Sid : Suss : College, Cambridge, is full of extracts on medical matters; probably Smith was interested in medicine in his Cambridge days.

## of Iohn Smith

Thus, living uprightly in the sight of all men, being both painful and careful to do good to all, for soul and body, according to his ability, it pleased the Lord at length to visit him with sickness, and with a disease whereby he perceived that his life should not long continue, yet remaining about seven weeks, during the which space he behaved himself Christian-like, examining his life, confessing his sins, praying for patience, having always confidence in the mercy and favour of the Lord towards him in the end. A day or two before his death the brethren having recourse unto him, and some of them remaining by him, he uttered these speeches:—Concerning the Church of England, the Separation, and Mr. Helwis, saith he, I do confess my grievous sins and corruptions in the manner of my carriage towards them in words and writings; but as for the points of controversy betwixt us, I am persuaded I had the better of them; and as for my faith, saith he, as I have taught and written, so I now hold—that the Gospel hath two parts: the promise on God's behalf, and the condition on our behalf. The promise is the forgiveness of sins and the spirit of regeneration, wherein we can do nothing, but must be mere patients; the condition, wherein we must be co-workers with the Lord, is to turn from our sins, and to believe His promises, He preventing us with His grace: the which if we faithfully do, then, saith he, the Lord will perform His promise unto us, wherein in some measure I have done my endeavour unfeignedly, yet I confess I have been and am too short therein, but for my weakness and wants I fly to the abundant mercy of the Lord, who will help those which seek unto Him, and if you know any better, I beseech you instruct me before my death; and if I live (saith he) I will walk with no other people but you all my days. He desired his wife also so to do, being persuaded that she would: and wished that his children should remain with us, praying us to inform them wherein we saw them do amiss. And as for himself, he did now desire nothing but that the Lord would take away his sins, and purge his heart, and then he were fit for Him. And being desired that if the Lord did let him feel it while he were able to speak, that he would manifest it unto us for our comfort, which he promised to do, saying that if the Lord would vouchsafe that mercy it might be testimony to the whole world, so resting under the hand of God waiting His good pleasure, one coming unto him, and asking how he did, “I wait for death” (saith he), “for death.”



## The Life and Death

"But," saith she, "I hope you look for another comfort first." "I mean," saith he, "the death of my sins." After complaining of his sins, one of the brethren alleging unto him the words of the prophet, where he saith that the Lord will not despise the broken heart, "No," said he, "for I know He is a merciful God, and I seeking unto Him I know He will seek me with the prodigal child." Another saying unto him, "I hope you shall do well; I trust you appertain unto the Lord," "Yes," said he, "I do appertain unto Him, for I seek Him and I run not from Him," alleging the words of the prophet where he saith, "Seek my face: my heart answered, I will seek thy face." Another coming unto him, said, "We must part from you," "No," said he, "we shall never part, for we are all of one spirit;" "But," she said, "I mean with your body." He answered, "Let that go, let that go," shaking his hand. The same person having a sad and heavy countenance, he said, "Why do you weep, and break my heart?" "But," saith she, "I weep not." He answered her, "But some come unto me weeping, I pray you let us depart comfortably, and weep not as those that are without hope."

Afterward, calling his children to him, as Jacob did his sons a little before his death, he began to instruct them in the principles of religion, teaching them that there is one God, creator of all things, one Lord Jesus Christ, in whom alone salvation consisteth, one Holy Spirit, one faith, one baptism, manifesting that the baptism of infants was unlawful. And demanding of his children whether they had rather that he should die or live, they weeping said that he might live. "If I live," saith he, "I must correct you, and beat you, but you must know that I do it not because I hate you, but because I love you, even as now the Lord chasteneth me, not because He hateth me, but for that He loveth me." The brethren then speaking privately among themselves, he said, "I pray you, brethren, speak up, that I may learn also." And one asking him a question, being a stranger, which tended to strife, he would not permit an answer, "Because," said he, "I desire to hear no contention now," being desirous to end strife and contention in whomsoever he perceived it to be, whereby he shewed himself to be of the number of those which are the blessed children of God, as Christ pronounceth the peacemakers to be (Matt. v.).

In the night before his death, some waking with him, he desired



## of Iohn Smith

them to raise up some speech of comfort unto him. It being answered that he knew all things which we could say unto him, he answered, "That is not it; for when the Lord offereth me any thing I speak, and when he doth not I am silent." And, speaking of the fruit of the country that it was some cause of diseases, correcting himself, "I think," saith he, "it is but an idle speech," so careful was he not to speak vainly. Afterwards, awakening out of a slumber, he asked, "Where are the brethren?" We coming unto him, he said, "Come, let us praise the Lord, let us praise the Lord; He is so gracious and good unto me yea, He dealeth wonderfully mercifully with me." His wife then asking him, saying, "Have you obtained your desire?" "No," said he, "but He maketh me able to bear all that He layeth upon me, and to pass through it." Being answered that it was the performance of God's promise, who will lay no more upon His than they are able to bear, "It is true," saith he, "for I find the scriptures so true by experience as can be."

In the morning, being asked if we should praise God for that He had given him strength and ability to pass that night, "Yes," saith he, "let us praise His name, and though I cannot be the mouth, yet I will be the ear; and let us come before the Lord with an upright heart, for that is well pleasing unto Him." So, drawing nearer unto his end, at length he, lifting up his hands, said, "The Lord hath holpen me; the Lord hath holpen me." His wife asking him if he had received his desire, "Yes," said he, "I praise the Lord, He hath now holpen me, and hath taken away my sins," and not long after, stretching forth his hands and his feet, he yielded up the ghost, whereby his life and death being both correspondent to his doctrine, it is a great means both to comfort us, and to confirm us in the truth.

The eye and ear witnesses of these things are the brethren.

[There follows a page of "Errata," but the corrections only relate to the Confession of Faith. The whole work concludes with a note which we give literally.]

### PRINTER TO THE REDER.

Sondri other falts, gentle reader, ar escaped in the printing in words, letters, poyns, whereof soon shal be amended the rest help the self by the sence and impute not the Printer's falte to the Authour but reken the greast [*i.e.* greatest] were least his.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE REMAINDERS OF SMITH'S COMPANY—UNION WITH THE MENNONITE CHURCH

BEFORE passing on to consider the next move taken by Thomas Helwys and his Church which landed them in London, the story of the company who adhered to Smith may well be concluded. From the researches made at Amsterdam by Professor Müller, the results of which he communicated to Dr. Evans, it appears that the band of Englishmen who had followed Smith still held together after his death, and continued to hold religious meetings in the "Cake-House of Jan Munter." They were not yet admitted to full fellowship with the Mennonites, nor were they formally constituted in Church order amongst themselves. They were content to wait for the way to be opened for them. Meanwhile they regularly held their own services of praise, prayer and preaching, and would no doubt attend the worship of the Mennonites as occasion offered and their acquaintance with the Dutch tongue improved. As the members of the Waterlander Mennonite Church came to know them more intimately objections to their admission as full members would fade away.

At length, on Thursday, November 6, in the year 1614, just over two years after Smith's death and some four years after the motion for union had first been

## Admitted to the Mennonite Church

made, the consistory of the Mennonite Church decided to bring the request of the English for admission before the whole body of Church members for consideration. This was done on Sunday, November 9, and two or three weeks were allowed to the members in which to think the matter over and lodge objections. No objections being made the consistory gave notice to the Church on Sunday, January 18, 1615, that they proposed to take up the English into the community on the following Wednesday according to their request. But on the Tuesday "the English in the Cake House," numbering about thirty men and women, were summoned before the consistory in the "Spyker" or Granary meeting-house and had two questions put to them:—

"(1) Do you persist in your demand to join the community ?

"(2) Do you stand firm in agreeing to our interpretation of the dogmas and professions of faith which you have signed with your own hands ?"

All declared that they did, except about four, "who stood not firm in some points," chiefly about the lawfulness of magistracy and taking oaths. They promised, however, not to make any opposition in the Church on those points. The consistory were for striking out the names of these doubtful candidates and admitting the rest. "But all the English declared forthwith that if some were struck out, all of them would stick to their seclusion as they were too much attached to each other to separate." The consistory of the Church, however, would not venture to admit the few whose opinions differed from those of the Waterlander Mennonites, and who declined to sign the

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

Confession of Faith a second time, unless express leave to admit them were given by the general body of Church members. The affair had come to a deadlock, and it looked as though the question of admission to Church fellowship would again be hung up.

It is strange that the Mennonite Church, which was by tradition and spirit a non-confessional Church, should in this case have departed so far from its principles as to make a doctrinal test a condition of admission to membership. The fact that the dissentients refused to sign the Confession, drawn up by Hans de Ries and Lubbert Gerrits, a second time indicates that the subscription made to that document on the previous occasion was only tentative and provisional. To the regret of all, then, the question of admission was left undecided. When the English withdrew from the consistory meeting they retired to discuss the matter among themselves, and that night the four dissenting friends urged the others to join the Mennonite community, even if they themselves were to be rejected. This course was agreed upon, and early on the morning of Wednesday, January 21, 1615, the friends reported their decision to the consistory, and the way being thus cleared they were that very day joyfully admitted to the community in the open congregation.

Before they were admitted there were a few who had to be baptized. There was Swithin Grindall, a young man of parts from Tunstal, in Yorkshire. His parents John and Mary Grindall had been baptized by John Smith, and now he was waiting for admission. Margaret Morris, to whom he was betrothed, had signed the Confession of Faith with the rest of Smith's company.

## New English Members

She would be glad to see her man joined to the Church. A few months later they were married. Here is the record.

"1615, May 2. Swithunus Grindall of Tunstal in Yorkshire 'legatuurwerker' aged 22 years and Margriete Moritz of Scheckbye [*i.e.* Skegby] in Nottinghamshire 24 years."

These young people were already being assimilated to their environment in Holland, for after their names, even in 1615, in the Mennonite Church Book is written in Dutch "called Swithin Janssoon" and "Grietje Thomas." Years later Grindall translated letters from England into Dutch for the benefit of his fellow members in the Mennonite Church as these subscriptions to copies of letters from Lincoln and Tiverton testify:—

"Copied May 31, and June primo, 1631 by your servant and brother Swithune Gryndall."

"Translated from the English language June 5, 1631. Your brother Swithune Gryndall,"<sup>1</sup>

He was evidently a steadfast and useful member.

There was "Anthony Thomassen an old man husband of Lysbeth, an English woman." He was the father of Solomon Thomson. His son had become a "bombazine worker," and was a lad of some eighteen summers when baptized by Smith. I take it he sent over for his aged father when he began to feel his feet in Amsterdam, and now the old man was about to follow his son into the fellowship of the Church. There were Thomas Odell, a spur-maker, and Thomas Huysbertsen, glover, a bachelor.

These four were baptized, doubtless in the Mennonite

<sup>1</sup> Evans, *Baptists*, ii., pp. 44, 51.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

fashion, on that day by Hans de Ries in the "Cake House," their usual place of meeting, and then the company of English proceeded to the Waterlander meeting and were received into the community in the open congregation. No fresh baptism was required in the case of those who had been baptized by John Smith, and thus the baptism administered by him was tacitly acknowledged to be valid. On that point the arguments of Helwys had been of some effect, and this act of recognition would remove one ground of controversy between the members of his little Church and the Mennonites.

Though the English were now admitted to all the privileges of the Church, could partake of the Lord's Supper and the ordinance of baptism, share in relief, and participate in the discipline, yet they continued to hold separate meetings for worship and preaching in English in the Cake House. On June 8, 1620, one of their preachers was confirmed to full service and ordained as Elder by the old minister Reinier Wybrants and his colleague Peter Andriessen, and thus they might be considered a separate English Church of the Mennonite community with a minister now empowered to administer baptism and the Lord's Supper. Up to the year 1637 baptism was frequently administered in the Cake House. It is significant that a letter from Amsterdam in 1624 to friends in England was "signed with the consent and allowance of the ministers and deacons of the Dutch and English Churches of Jesus Christ in that place,"<sup>1</sup> as though the two were separately organised.

<sup>1</sup> Evans, ii., p. 37.



## English and Dutch Coalesce

Gradually the English became merged in the Dutch. "The union of the two parties," says Professor Müller, "had become so close that on the 2th of July, 1640, an Englishman, Joseph Drew, was proposed by the Waterland consistory as minister, which offer he accepted on the 2th of December," although he was rather afraid that his language might be an objection, he being used to the English.<sup>1</sup> With the meeting of the Long Parliament the severe treatment of those who differed from the Anglican Church was relaxed. The stream of migration to Holland was checked. It had already in part been diverted to New England. As the inflow of fresh English-speaking members ceased, the absorption by the Mennonites of the Amsterdam section of that Church which Smith had gathered at Gainsborough was completed. It remains to trace the fortunes of the section that adhered to Helwys so far as the story can at present be recovered.

<sup>1</sup> Evans, i., p. 223.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE RETURN OF HELWYS AND MURTON TO ENGLAND — THE MYSTERY OF INIQUITY — CONTROVERSY WITH JOHN ROBINSON

ABOUT the time of Smith's death Helwys came to the conviction that it was wrong to flee from persecution, and that he and his countrymen had taken a false step in leaving their own land and seeking refuge in Holland. They ought to have remained at home and patiently borne all that man might do to them for the sake of the truth. He decided to return to England. His views upon this point were set out in the concluding pages<sup>1</sup> of a singular book entitled "A Short Declaration of the Mistery of Iniquity," which he published in 1612. This book bears evidence in its style and matter that Helwys was greatly overwrought. His mind was obsessed with the idea that he had arrived at "the days of greatest tribulation spoken of by Christ wherein the abomination of desolation is seen to be set in the holy place." There had been "a general departing from the faith and an utter desolation of all true religion." The Roman Catholic Church was wrong, the Anglican Church was wrong, Puritanism was wrong, Brownism was wrong, John Robinson in particular was wrong. Helwys had caught a vision of the truth, and the stupendous task of

<sup>1</sup> *Mistery of Iniquity*, pp. 204—212. See also "Epistle to the Reader." Sig. A ij.

## Helwys and King James

setting the world right had been laid upon him. Like many another religious enthusiast, he felt a deep concern about the salvation of the King. If he could only convert the King, if he could bring James Stuart to see eye to eye with Thomas Helwys, there would be hope for religion in the land. The King at any rate could take the sword from the bishop's hands and give a free field in his dominions for truth to make its way without persecution. It is in his pleading with the King for religious liberty that we come upon some of the most dignified and eloquent passages in all the writings of Helwys. He is here lifted up by the very greatness of his theme. Almost the first, if not the first, among English writers to distinguish between temporal and spiritual authority and to define their limits, he wrote with passion on behalf of liberty for all peaceable subjects in matters of religion.

The copy of this book preserved in the Bodleian Library was designed as a presentation copy for the King. It bears on the flyleaf a dedicatory inscription in the neatest handwriting of Helwys as follows :—

“Heare, O King, and dispise not y<sup>e</sup> counsell of y<sup>e</sup> poore and let their complaints come before thee.

“The King is a mortall man and not God, therefore hath no power over y<sup>e</sup> immortall soules of his subiects to make lawes and ordinances for them and to set spirituall Lords over them.

“If the King have authority to make spirituall Lords and lawes, then he is an immortall God and not a mortall man.

“O, King, be not seduced by deceivers to sin so against God whome thou oughtest to obey nor against thy poore subiects who ought and will obey thee in all thinges with body, life and goods or els let their lives be taken from y<sup>e</sup> earth.

“God save y<sup>e</sup> King.”

“THO: HELWYS.

“Spittlefeild neare London.”

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

This fixes the place where Helwys pitched when he returned from Amsterdam. I do not think he came back before the close of the year 1612 or the early months of 1613. He put his book to the press in Holland, and probably saw it completed before he left that country. I cannot remember any passage in it that would indicate that he had already left that land. It is true that he says on the last page, in speaking of the Separatist leaders :—

“ How much better had it been that they had given their lives for that truth they profess in their own Countries. Now, as we through the grace of God and by the warrant of his word . . . . cast away these perverters of the holy scriptures and their doctrines, so we wish all so to do that fear God and seek the glory of his name and come and lay down their lives in their own country for Christ and his truth.” <sup>1</sup>

But this I take to be a general invitation to join in the venture upon which Helwys and his companions were now resolved to embark. The tone and drift of the epistle to the reader and the concluding section on flight in persecution, the last parts to be added to the book, indicate that Helwys was on the point of undertaking this mission to his King and countrymen, and not that he had already entered upon it :

“ Let none think that we are altogether ignorant what building and warfare we take in hand and that we have not sat down and in some measure thoroughly considered what the cost and danger may be, and also let none think that we are without sense and feeling of our own inability to begin and our weakness to endure to the end the weight and danger of such work, but in all these things we hope and wait for wisdom and strength from the Lord.”

<sup>1</sup> *Mystery of Iniquity*, p. 212.

## Disappointed Hopes

Helwys writes with a feeling of bitterness and disappointment about the results of their sojourn in Holland, and insinuates that the leaders in the Separatist movement there acted from craven and worldly motives. As a layman he looked with a jealous eye upon the salary paid to those who ministered in spiritual things. He was grieved at the defection of beloved friends. The high hopes with which he left England but a few short years before were dashed.

“We hold ourselves bound to acknowledge and, that others might be warned, to manifest, how we have been (through our great weakness) misled by deceitful hearted leaders, who have and do seek to save their lives and will make sure not to lose them for Christ, and therefore they flee into foreign Countries and free States and draw people after them to support their Kingdoms, first seeking their own safety and then publishing (as they pretend) the gospel or seeking the Kingdom of heaven as far as they may with their safety.” . . .<sup>1</sup>

“ . . . We will pass by the lamentable fruits and judgements that we have [seen] and do see with our eyes follow this damnable error when many, yea the most men that had in a great measure forsaken the love of the world and begun to be zealous of some good things being drawn by this opinion and these seducers into foreign countries, not knowing which way to support their outward estate, have turned again unto the world and are fain to hunt to and fro, far and near, after every occasion, and all is too little to satisfy most of their wants, and nothing will satisfy some of their desires. All these things and many more these hirelings their shepherds can well bear withal so that they return to the hive that *their* position may not be reproved. And those of best hearts and some of best quality that cannot run and rove and set their hearts to seek the world consume that they have and fall under hard conditions and by little and little lose their first love also. It is the general judgment we aim at in all this, in that by these means former zeal and the best first beginnings that were in these men

<sup>1</sup> *Mystery of Iniquity*, pp. 204, 205.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

do vanish, fade away, and come to nothing, to the unfeigned grief of our souls to see it.”<sup>1</sup>

To these reproaches cast upon the Separatist leaders John Robinson pertinently replied :—

“If<sup>2</sup> we principally sought our earthly good or safety, why did we not abide at home, or why return we not thither applying ourselves to the times as so many thousands do?”

He declared they might have procured to themselves “as he knew well,” much more earthly help and furtherance here in Holland if they had only sought to set up such a Church as Helwys had framed—an Anabaptist Church “out of which we should throw our children as he hath done, which we might do safely enough if [they are] without sin.” “And for drawing over the people, I know none of the guides but were as much drawn over by them as drawing them.”

Then comes in the passage already quoted telling of Helwys’s forwardness in the work of migration, and Robinson continues :—

“Neither is it likely if he, and the people with him at Amsterdam, could have gone on comfortably as they desired, that the unlawfulness of flight would ever have troubled him ; but more than likely it is that, having scattered the people by his heady and indiscreet courses and otherwise disabled himself, that natural confidence which abounded in him took occasion, under an appearance of spiritual courage, to press him upon those desperate courses which he of late hath run. By which he might also think it his glory to dare and challenge King and State to their faces and not to give way to them ; no, not a foot : as indeed it far better agrees with a bold spirit and haughty stomach thus to do, than with the apostle in the base infirmity of Christ to be let down through a wall in a basket, and to run away.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Mister, of Iniquity*, p. 211.

<sup>2</sup> Robinson, *Works*, iii., p. 159.

<sup>3</sup> Robinson, *Works*, iii., 1614, p. 159. See *ante*, p. 107.



## Friends in London

Helwys had kinsmen in London of good standing. His cousin, Sir Gervase Helwys (1561—1615), was Lieutenant of the Tower, but was soon to be involved in trouble for complicity in Sir Thos. Overbury's death, for which he was beheaded on Tower Hill, November 20, 1615. The family of his uncle, Geoffrey Helwys (1541—1616), "Merchant Taylor" and alderman of the City of London, would perhaps be more in sympathy with him than that of his cousin. His uncle had been elected alderman for the ward of "Farringdon Within" on December 14, 1605, was chosen Sheriff in 1607, and removed to Walbrook January 9, 1610. There were sons in this family already doing well in business. The presence of these kinsmen in London may have determined Thomas Helwys to settle there, or he may have chosen the metropolis as the best centre for proclaiming his message. Accordingly he passed over with his little company, together with John Murton, his chief helper, to London. There were not many in his Church, for in answer to Helwys's charge, that he fled without having "any intent or meaning to preach the Gospel to those Cities [Amsterdam and Leyden],"<sup>1</sup> Robinson could say, "We have so preached to others in those cities as that by the blessing of God working with us, we have gained more to the Lord than Mr. Helwisse's Church consists of."<sup>2</sup> By going to London they ran into the face of trouble. John Murton was in prison in 1613. It is clear from what Robinson says in 1614 that they had suffered persecution :—

"I would know how he [Helwys] and the people with him

<sup>1</sup> *Mistery*, p. 205.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, iii., p. 160.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

have preached to the city of London? Surely not as the apostles did in the synagogues and public places; much less do they flee *being persecuted* (or go, if so they will have it) from city to city to preach."

It is possible that Helwys himself had been imprisoned when Robinson wrote his book. Helwys had asked, "When will these men according to this rule of Christ (Luke ix. 5) shake off the dust of their feet for a witness against Amsterdam and Leyden which Cities neither receive them nor the word they bring otherwise than they receive Turks and Jews and all sorts who come only to seek safety and profit?" "I answer," says Robinson, "when we are apostles as they were [to whom Jesus gave the command], and do again ask, *why did not he*, and why do not his companions shake off the dust of *their* feet against London which receives them not at all?"<sup>1</sup>

It may be inferred from this that Robinson knew that Helwys was now detained in London in prison, but thought he might very well have run away when he found his message was not received there. Helwys had urged against the English Separatists who had fled to Holland the case of Christ's enjoining the man dispossessed of the devil to go home to his friends and show them what great things the Lord had done for him. Robinson retorts, "Why go not they home every one to his friends for that end, but abide in London where fewest of their friends are?"<sup>2</sup>

Thus we see the first Baptist Church planted on English soil in the metropolis. It was a Church led

<sup>1</sup> Robinson, *Works*, iii., p. 163.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, iii., p. 162.

## First Baptist Church in London

and officered by laymen. It had been tested by the trials of exile and the fires of controversy. It had been enriched by contact with the life of Holland. It had set forth its Declaration of Faith to the world. It came greatly daring into certain trouble and persecution, resolved to bear all for the sake of the truth of God. It was deprived almost at once of its chief leaders, by imprisonment, but still it held together. These brave men and women were dignified by the greatness of the cause they had espoused. Their Church formed a nucleus round which those of kindred mind amongst their countrymen could group themselves. From the heart of this community there went out in after years a noble plea for liberty of conscience which was fruitful of good results. As they toiled at their crafts for a livelihood they meditated upon the deep things of God and the soul. In the welter of predestinarian theology that marked their time they alone amongst Englishmen outside the ranks of the Anglican and Roman Churches kept a clear field in their scheme of thought for the free moral action of man.

### HELWYS ON THE ANGLICAN BISHOPS

We need not follow Helwys into all the topics handled in his last book. There are, however, one or two passages which come out of the heart of his life experience, and some that relate to his controversy with Robinson that should be noted. I do not know of any more vivid picture of the persecuting policy of Elizabethan and Jacobean bishops in their efforts to secure uniformity, than the one given in the following words with which Helwys addressed them:—

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

"Let us persuade you in fear to God and shame to men to cast away all these courses we shall now mention. Do not when a poor soul by violence is brought before you to speak his conscience in the profession of his religion to his God—do not first implore the oath *ex officio*. Oh, most wicked course! And if he will not yield to that then imprison him close. Oh, horrible severity! If he will not be forced by imprisonment, then examine him on divers articles without oath to see if he may be intrapped any way, O, grievous impiety!—and if any piece of advantage (either in word or writing or by witness) can be gotten turn the Magistrates sword upon him and take his life, Oh, bloody cruelty! If no advantage can be found get him banished out of his natural country and from his father's house, let him live or starve, it matters not, Oh, unnatural compassionateness without pity! Let these courses be far from you, for there is no show of grace, religion nor humanity in these courses. This is to lie in wait for blood, and to lay snares secretly to take the simple to slay him. And . . . let it be truly observed whether those that are of the Romish profession (servants of the first beast) coming in question before the Hierarchy have not found much more favour than those that have stood most for reformation? And hath there not been gnashing of teeth and gnawing of tongues with all extreme perverseness and contempt against the one, when there hath been good mild and even carriage towards the other? Which good carriage towards them we disapprove not nor envy not, but could wish that the wholesome word of doctrine with all the cords of love were applied and used unto them for their information and drawing them from their blind errors. But we mention it to this end to show what uprightness there can be to God or the King in this."<sup>1</sup>

It will be noticed from the latter sentences that though Helwys detested Roman Catholicism like poison, he was prepared to accord to Roman Catholics that tolerance and fair treatment at the hands of the State which he demanded for himself.

<sup>1</sup> *Mystery of Iniquity*, p. 29.

# Controversy with John Robinson

## CONTROVERSY WITH JOHN ROBINSON

In his controversy with Robinson about the baptism of infants and the invalidity of the baptism received in the Church of England Helwys pressed his opponent hard. It must have been galling to Robinson to find Helwys, an ordinary layman, calling his great work on the "Justification of Separation," a "tedious booke,"<sup>1</sup> and a whole section of the "Mistery of Iniquity" devoted to laying open "some particular errors in Mr. Robinson's book of 'Justification of Separation.'" Helwys did not mince his words in addressing the Brownists. He well knew that he had "written in some things sharply," but, says he, "there are divers of you both near and dear unto us whom we require in love (as we do all) to apply the sharpest reproof to themselves, for they had need. And touching you, Mr. Ro[binson], remember that you have a letter of most loving respect in your hands concerning these things to which you have not made answer, whereby to prevent the publishing of this that especially concern[s] you."<sup>2</sup>

As Robinson had not replied, Helwys included in this book his forceful criticism of the Brownists' illogical position regarding baptism. Robinson and the rest of the Separatists had written and spoken strongly against the Church of England. To them she was "Babylon" and worse. They had renounced her and all her works. Yet they had retained her baptism as valid. They professed to have separated from the world and joined themselves to Christ, but the New Testament knew of

<sup>1</sup> *Mistery*, p. 177.

<sup>2</sup> *Mistery*, p. 156.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

no way for men to join unto Christ but to amend their lives and be baptized and by baptism to put on Christ. This they had not done. If they regarded the baptism received in the Anglican Church as true baptism, then they must regard the Anglican Church as a true Church, and in that case they were utterly wrong in separating from her. That was the gist of the argument of Helwys. It was only by making curious and subtle distinctions that the Separatists could justify their position on this matter to themselves. Henry Barrowe laboured with the difficulty.<sup>1</sup> It was admitted that Anglican baptism was not all that it might be, but it was certainly safer and more respectable than Anabaptism. John Robinson devoted a large amount of time and ingenuity to the consideration of this question, and satisfied himself that true baptism might be administered in a false Church. By making an arbitrary distinction between inner and outer baptism, he felt that he saved the case of infant baptism which was made effectual to believers in after years on their repentance.

These arguments struck the plain man as somewhat sophistical, and they were rudely brushed away in Helwys's book. The sections of his work dealing with these points were not without effect. Robinson admits as much when he says "divers<sup>2</sup> weak persons have been troubled and abused" by them. He also tells us that Helwys by his "loud and licentious clamours" had "affrighted two or three simple people from that their baptism so received," in the assemblies of the Church of

<sup>1</sup> See his *Brief Discoverie of the False Church*, 1590, pp. 115—120. Robinson followed the same line of argument as Barrowe.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, iii., pp. 164, 197.



## John Robinson's Reply to Helwys

England. At any rate Robinson felt this book by Helwys and the matters it handled to be of such importance that he took pains to answer at some length the parts which specially concerned him. He issued his reply in 1614. In answer to Helwys's contention that you cannot "divide the water and the spirit" in the true Christian baptism, and that "the baptism of Christ is to be washed with water and the Holy Ghost,"<sup>1</sup> Robinson makes a statement which throws a glint of light upon the discipline of the Separatist societies.

"I would know," he says, "of these double-washers, whether, if a man professing the same faith with them in holiness outwardly, but in hypocrisy, should be baptized by them and that afterwards his heart should strike him, and God give him true repentance (let it be the person they know of that fled from us under admonition for sin, and joining to and being baptized by them was presently after by themselves found in the same sin and so censured), whether, I say, they would repeat their outward washing formerly made, as none, because there was not joined with it the inward washing of the Spirit? Or if they think it none and so the fore-mentioned person not, indeed, received in by baptism, as they speak, wherefore did they then excommunicate the same person?"<sup>2</sup>

It is only fair that Robinson's conclusion about the retention of Anglican baptism should be given in his own words. "I conclude," he says, "that there is an outward baptism by water and an inward baptism by the Spirit which, though they

<sup>1</sup> *Mistery*, p. 139.

<sup>2</sup> *Of Religious Communion, Works*, iii, pp. 184, 185.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

ought not to be severed in their time by God's appointment yet many times are by man's default; that the outward baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, administered in an apostate Church, is false baptism in the administration, and yet in itself and own nature a spiritual ordinance, though abused; and whose spiritual uses cannot be had without repentance: by which repentance and the after baptism of the Spirit, it is sanctified and not to be repeated."<sup>1</sup> This conclusion may have satisfied Robinson and his followers, but it was not likely to satisfy the more thoroughgoing and downright Separatists.

In regard to the case of infants Helwys held them to be incapable of baptism, but at the same time he thought the redemptive work of Christ extended to them and cancelled the corruption in their nature, and that they were accordingly all saved, though not actual members of the Church. Robinson pleaded for infant baptism. He argued that this rite came in the place of circumcision. He did indeed desire that all children were saved "if such were the will of God, and so could gladly believe if the Scriptures taught it."<sup>2</sup> But as he found no statement to that effect in the Bible he concluded that those which perished did so "for that original guilt and corruption, wherein they are conceived and born being 'the children of wrath by nature' and therein liable to God's curse every way." Here again we see the finer natural instincts of a noble nature crushed back and silenced at the behest of a literal interpretation of Scripture.

The Church which Helwys brought back to England

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, iii., p. 185.

<sup>2</sup> *Works*, iii., p. 231.

## Flight in Persecution

continued in controversy with Robinson long after its leader's death. I have not been able to determine when that event happened. Robinson's book was written while Helwys was still alive. That brings us to 1614. It is possible he was then in prison. When his uncle, Geoffrey Helwys, made his will (dated April 8, 1616) he was dead. His wife Joan survived him. He left a family behind him to mourn his loss, treasure his memory, and carry on his name. His little Church, which had come with him through much tribulation, was left in the care of John Murton, who, as we shall see, was faithful to his trust.

### FLIGHT IN PERSECUTION

*Note.* Helwys was not the first among the Separatists to have doubts about the lawfulness of flight from persecution. A letter dated July 8, 1611, mentions a group of Separatists "in Suffolke holding it unlawful to eat blood and to fly."<sup>1</sup> The apostolic prohibition from eating blood was observed by many of the old General Baptists down till the latter part of the eighteenth century. Anointing with oil by the elders was also observed in some of their societies in cases of sickness; and they kept up the custom of "feet-washing" for many years, in common with the Mennonites of Holland.

<sup>1</sup> Lawne's *Prophane Schisme*, p. 55; cf. Acts xv, 20, xxi, 25.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE ANABAPTISTS AND LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE

LIBERTY of conscience is taken so much as a matter of course in these days that it requires a distinct effort of the imagination to picture the condition of affairs with regard to religious liberty at the opening of the seventeenth century. In those days all the forces of the Crown, the Church, and the Parliament were bent upon securing a uniformity in faith and worship throughout the whole of England and Wales. A jealous eye was kept upon the press. The number of "master printers" was strictly limited. The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London claimed the right of censorship over the press and freely exercised it. The Wardens of the Stationers' Company were on the alert to check unlicensed printing. The Bishops were busy in suppressing varieties of religious belief and practice. They sought to bring all candidates for the Anglican ministry to one norm of doctrine, and still more to one norm in the conduct of public worship. The law compelled all over sixteen years of age to repair on Sundays to some "usual place of Common Prayer to hear the Divine Service established by Her Majesty's laws." Severe penalties were laid upon those who ventured to hold "meetings under colour or pretence of any exercise of religion contrary to Her Majesty's said laws." It was unsafe even to quietly abstain from attendance at

## Restrictions on the Press

public worship. Absence from Church for a month was an offence against the law.

All this bore hardly both upon Roman Catholics and on those who desired a further reformation in religion. But neither Catholics nor Puritans were themselves prepared to allow liberty in religion to others. A long series of experiments, a period of civil strife, and many years of discussion had to be gone through before religious liberty was finally secured. English refugees found in Holland a measure of religious liberty unknown in their own land. There at any rate they were allowed to meet for the exercise of religious worship apart from the official Church. There, too, some of them came into contact with the Mennonites, who maintained on principle that the sword should not be used to uphold religion. They declared that Christ alone was King over his Church, and that freedom in religion should be allowed to all who observed civil order.

It was from this source that Englishmen drew the idea of claiming and granting religious liberty for all peaceable citizens. In saying this I do not forget the pleasing endorsement of religious toleration in the *Utopia* of Sir Thomas More, but that had no practical effect either upon himself or other Englishmen. It was from the despised Anabaptists that the principle of "soul liberty" passed on into practical expression in the religious life of England. A letter to the ancient Separatist Church at Amsterdam under Francis Johnson tells of three varieties of English Anabaptists to be found in that city:—

"Master Smith an Anabaptist of one sort and Master Helwise of another and Master Busher of another."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lawne's *Prophane Schisme*, p. 55.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

Though all three differed from one another on many important points, they all pleaded for liberty of conscience. Of Leonard Busher but little is known. He was a citizen of London. Some writers conjecture that he was a descendant of Domynic Busher, a Walloon refugee, who subscribed £100 to a loan to Elizabeth in 1588. He has recently been identified with the Mark Leonard Busher who wrote a letter from Delft, dated December 8, 1642, when he was "far into 71 years," to certain Anabaptists at Amsterdam.<sup>1</sup> From this letter we may gather that he was prepared to acknowledge as brethren any who believed Jesus to be the Messiah. In this position he anticipated John Locke and other Unitarians of his school who reduced the fundamentals of Christian fellowship to this minimum.

Busher held some singular opinions. He thought the apostolic injunction to abstain from blood was still obligatory. He opposed the intermarriage of cousins, and pleaded for the abolition of the death penalty for theft. He was keenly interested, like many other Anabaptists, in the Jews. "Christ hath commanded us," he says, "to teach all nations and they are the first." He thought nothing but good could come of their being allowed to return "to inhabit and dwell under His Majesty's dominion."

In Professor Masson's "Life of Milton" the statement is made that Leonard Busher's book, "Religion's Peace—a Plea for Liberty of Conscience," of the year 1614, "is certainly the earliest known publication in which full liberty of conscience is openly advocated."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Transactions of Baptist Historical Society*, 1909, vol. i., p. 107. Paper Dr. W. T. Whitley.

<sup>2</sup> *Life of Milton*, iii., p. 102.



## Anabaptists Advocate Religious Liberty

An examination of the works of John Smith and Thomas Helwys has convinced me that they have a prior claim to the honour of first pleading for this principle—not to speak of that nameless Anabaptist who came to Knox's lodging in London with a book incidentally charging the Reformers with being "persecutors on whom the blood of Servetus crieth a vengeance." Knox replied to the "blasphemous cavillations" of this writer, who had dared to ask such pointed questions as these:—"Can the sheep persecute the wolf? Doth Abel kill Cain? Doth David, though he might, kill Saul? Shortly—doth he which is born of the Spirit kill him which is born after the flesh?" It was an indirect result of the burning of Servetus that it helped forward the elucidation of the principles of religious liberty in the minds of those who were repelled by that barbarous act. It is in Smith's last writings that we find his enunciation of views in favour of religious tolerance. "I profess," he says, "that difference in judgment for matter of circumstance, as are all things of the outward Church, shall not cause me to refuse the brotherhood of any penitent and faithful Christian whatsoever." And in the Confession of Faith drawn up in the last few months of his life he plainly states the principle of religious liberty in these terms:—

"We believe that the Magistrate is not by virtue of his office to meddle with religion or matters of conscience to force or compel men to this or that form of religion or doctrine, but to leave Christian religion free to every man's conscience and to handle only civil transgressions, injuries and wrongs of man against man in murder, adultery, theft, &c., for Christ only is the King and Lawgiver of the church and conscience."

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

In the "*Mistery of Iniquity*," by Thomas Helwys, we also have an emphatic assertion of the principles of religious liberty. This work was issued two years before Busher's publication saw the light. One or two extracts from the body of the book will serve to indicate his views on this subject:—

"We bow ourselves to the earth before our Lord the King in greatest humbleness beseeching the King to judge righteous judgment herein; whether there be so unjust a thing and of so great cruel tyranny under the sun as to force men's consciences in their religion to God, seeing that if they err they must pay the price of their transgression with the loss of their souls? Oh, let the King judge, is it not most equal that men should choose their religion themselves, seeing they only must stand themselves before the judgment seat of God to answer for themselves, when it shall be no excuse for them to say we were commanded or compelled to be of this religion by the King or by them that had authority from him? And let our lord the King, that is a man of knowledge, yet further consider that if the King should by his power bring his people to the truth and they walk in the truth and die in the profession of it, in obedience to the King's power, either for fear or love, shall they be saved? The King knows they shall not. But they that obey the truth in love, whom the love of God constraineth, their obedience only shall be acceptable to God."

Helwys points to the passage in which Jesus rebuked those who would have called down fire upon his opponents, from which the King would see that—

"Christ will have no man's life touched for his cause. If the Samaritans will not receive him he passeth by them. If the Gadarenes pray him to depart he leaves them. If any refuse to receive his disciples he only bids them shake off the dust of their feet for a witness against them. Here is no sword of justice at all required or permitted to smite any for refusing Christ. Then let not our lord the King suffer his sword of justice . . . to be used to rule and keep in obedience the people of God and the

# King Jesus Greater than King James

King to the laws, statutes and ordinances of Christ which appertain to the well governing and ruling of the Kingdom of Christ. . . . the sword of whose Kingdom is spiritual, by the power of which sword only, Christ's subjects are to be ruled and kept in obedience to him. By the which sword our lord the King must be kept in obedience himself, if he be a disciple of Christ and a subject of Christ's Kingdom. And this takes away (without gainsaying) all the kingly power and authority of our lord the King in the Kingdom of Christ for he cannot be both a King and a subject in one and the same kingdom. The King's understanding heart will easily discern this."

It was not likely that King James would find such language palatable, and Helwys sought to forestall the charge that he and his followers were "movers of Sedition against the State" by pointing out that they held the doctrine of non-resistance.

"It will be a strange thing," he says, "to condemn men for Sedition who profess and teach that in all earthly things the King's power is to be submitted unto and in heavenly or spiritual things, if the King or any in authority under him shall exercise their power against any, they are not to resist by any way or means, although it were in their power, but rather to submit their lives as Christ and his Disciples did, and yet keep their consciences to God, and they that teach any other doctrine let them be held accursed."

Helwys here anticipated that doctrine of passive resistance which George Fox brought into prominence a generation later. Both would seem to have derived it from the teachings of Jesus, but in both cases it is likely that Anabaptists were the means of turning their thoughts to the subject. Although the work of these several pioneers of religious liberty may not have shown a great harvest in their own lifetime, it was destined to bear good fruit in after days. The advocates

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

of civil and religious liberty in the time of the Commonwealth looked back to the works of these valiant champions of religious freedom and found in them a storehouse of argument for promoting the same good cause in their own time, and at length the principles they enunciated were embodied in the law of the land.

## CHAPTER XXI

### JOHN MURTON—HIS LIFE AND WORK—CONTROVERSY WITH JOHN WILKINSON OF COLCHESTER

JOHN MURTON, on whom the mantle of Helwys fell, was born at Gainsborough in 1583, as we gather from the record of his marriage in the official register at Amsterdam.

“1608 August 23 John Murton of Queynsborch [*i.e.* Gainsborough] furrier 25 years and Jane Hodgkin of Worchepe [*i.e.* Worksop] 23 years.”

He is generally referred to as Morton, but he used the spelling “Murton” in signing his name, and that is the form in which John Robinson and his own father-in-law give it. Both he and his wife signed their own names in the marriage register. He was probably educated at the Gainsborough Grammar School. He acquired a forceful and racy style of writing. His sentences are far less involved than those of Helwys. His wife belonged to a family of middle station in life, which took an active part in parochial matters at Worksop. She was one of the strayed sheep from Richard Bernard’s flock, whom he would fain have called back. Nor was she the only member of that family to throw in her lot with John Smith’s Church. There was Alexander Hodgkin (b. 1586), a younger brother, who married on November 9, 1615, the widow of Thomas Bywater,

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

whose maiden name had been Ursula Hardstaff. Alexander remained faithful to John Smith when Helwys and Murton parted from him. He became a damask worker and prospered. We find greetings sent to him as late as 1631<sup>1</sup> in a letter from Tiverton.

The large proportion of young people in John Smith's Church gave his movement promise of life. One wonders whether John Murton and Jane Hodgkin<sup>2</sup> were betrothed before leaving England, or whether the close companionship into which they were thrown in Amsterdam led them to link their hearts in wedlock. I like to think of it as a happy marriage. They were suited to each other in age and station. Jane appears to have survived

<sup>1</sup> Evans, *Early Baptists*, ii., p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> From the parish register of Worksop it appears that Jane Hodgkin was one of a large family. The name is variously spelt. Her father, George Hodgskin, was a freeholder, and interested in religion. He paid a lump sum in 1591 for the right of setting up "one seat or stall at the north choir door" of Worksop Church for himself and his heirs. The entries in the parish register compared with the ages given to the Registrar in Holland when Jane Hodgkin and her brother were married show that there was either no special care taken to be exact, or that the Dutch Registrar made mistakes in entering the details.

"Jane d. of Georg Hodgskin 'chrisned' Dec. 22, 1583."  
She was therefore 24 years old on her marriage with Murton.

"Alexander. s. of Geo. Hodgskin" April 8, 1586. He was therefore 29 years old and not 25 on the occasion of his marriage with the widow of Thos. Bywater on November 9, 1615.

The family was connected by marriage with the Jepsons, of Worksop, William Jepson, a leading member of John Robinson's church, was cousin to Jane Murton and Alexander Hodgkin. I have succeeded in tracing the will of George Hodgkin. He drew it up on February 27, 1618, and describes himself as "yeoman." It fixes the dwelling place of Jane Murton at that time in the following clause:—

"I give and bequeath to my daughter Jane, John Murton's wife, dwelling at London, tenn poundes for the latter end of her child's pte."

Alexander, of Amsterdam, is not specially mentioned, but would be included in the general bequest "to every one of my other children for the latter end of their childe's parte twenty shillings apeece." To each of his grandchildren he left 6s. 8d. The will is that of a comfortable yeoman with a well-stocked house and farm. It was proved in the autumn of 1622, and Murton was presumably still in London at that time. It is registered in the District Probate Registry at York.



## A Daring Step

her husband, returning at last after the troubled sojourn in London to her friends in Holland, where she was received into the fellowship of the English Mennonite Church—as a haven of peace for her last years.

After his marriage we next hear of John Murton when he signs the letter with Helwys, William Piggott and Thomas Seamer on March 12, 1609—10, beseeching the Mennonite Church to deal carefully and according to God's Word in the dispute between them and those who adhered to John Smith. He, like Helwys, maintained the lawfulness of the baptism administered by Smith upon himself and his associates, and refused to tie the ordinance of baptism to any special order of men. He claimed the widest power for each Church of Christ, however small and poor it might be. Murton returned to London with Helwys, probably late in 1612. It was a daring step to take. They would know that Bartholomew Legate, who had been engaged in business transactions in Holland, had been burned at Smithfield on March 18, 1612, for heresy. A like fate might very well await themselves, but they would face it. Murton, on his arrival at Amsterdam, had taken up the work of a "furrier." It does not follow that he continued in that occupation, but the fur trade was a growing trade, and very likely he engaged in the same business in London.

Whatever his occupation, it was soon interrupted by imprisonment. We learn this from a curious little book entitled "The Sealed Fountaine opened to the Faithfull and their Seed. . . . By John Wilkinson, Prisoner at Colchester, against John Morton, Prisoner at London."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> British Museum, pp. ix., 15.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

The work was published by William Arthurbury, who says it was "composed by one of my ancient brethren departed in the Faith" [and] "left in my custody for the publicke goode." Murton and his friends had lost no time on their arrival in England in letting their views be known to the Separatists in and about Colchester, to whom Wilkinson ministered. Though Wilkinson himself was in prison, he penned a reply headed :—

"A reproof of some things written by John Morton and others of his company and followers to prove that Infants are not in the state of condemnation, and that therefore they are not to be baptized. By John Wilkinson, a Prisoner in Colchester for the Patience and Faith of the Saints, 1613."<sup>1</sup>

As Wilkinson states the case of his opponents with apparent fairness, we get an excellent view of Murton's opinions about infant baptism at this period from this "reproof."

"First," says he, "they write of infants as if concerning salvation and damnation the estate of all infants were alike, which is not true but very erroneous, for some infants are in the estate of salvation and those, so far as they may be discerned, are to be baptized for a testimony thereof. And others are in the estate of damnation, and these, so far as may be discerned are not to be baptized.

"Secondly, to free infants from being under the state of condemnation they imagine them to be without sin.

"Thirdly, the ground from which they gather infants to be without sin is this, that infants have transgressed no Law of God because they are incapable of any. In this they shoot short, for it doth not follow that because infants have not transgressed as they are infants, therefore they have not transgressed at all. They transgressed before they were infants, that is to say, in the loins of Adam."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Sealed Fountaine Opened*, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> P. 3.

## Wilkinson Controversy Murton

“Another conceit they have . . . that forasmuch as the Law *hath dominion over a man so long as he liveth*, therefore the law given to Adam concerneth not infants because they were not then alive.<sup>1</sup>

“Another nice conceit they have, that because our soul is given of God, that therefore the body and soul in every infant is first created apart and afterwards joined together in one. And out of this they gather again that the soul coming from God must needs be good and therefore without sin until it be joined to the body, and then have a law given and finally transgress that law. Out of these principles it seemeth to them that they may undeniably conclude that infants are without sin.<sup>2</sup>

“They conceive because infants have not understanding to discern between good and evil, therefore the law and sin concerneth them no more than it doth the unreasonable creatures. Lastly, they gather that if infants were not without sin Christ would not have said to his disciples, ‘that except they should convert [turn] and become as a little child they should not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.’ Neither have put his hands on them and blessed them if they had not been always without sin.” . . .

“Thus thick is the darkness wherewith these men [Murton and his friends] are overwhelmed, and yet they imagine that they only are in the *true light*, and all that are not of their mind are in *darkness*.”<sup>3</sup>

Wilkinson replied to these positions point by point, and also to their contention that the benefits of “Christ” extend to the whole animate creation. He concluded his tract in these terms :—

“Their conclusion is that Infants have not sinned, and therefore need no baptism for the remission of sins. And I answer that in Adam all mankind sinned and that by means thereof all infants come tainted with sin from the womb. And that therefore there is no hope of salvation for any infants, further than they may be reckoned to belong unto Christ as being the fruit of such

<sup>1</sup> P. 4.

<sup>2</sup> P. 5.

<sup>3</sup> P. 6.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

branches as are ingrafted in him by Faith, and those which be such are to be baptized, thereby to declare what benefit all have by Christ that are partakers with him, whose holiness is such that he sanctifieth all that have fellowship with him. To whom be glory for ever, Amen. John Wilkinson."

Thus we find that the beliefs for which Murton and his friends stood were closely examined and debated. We do not know much more about Wilkinson. He was dead by the year 1619, when his friends published his "Exposition<sup>1</sup> of the 13th chapter of the Revelation of Jesus Christ," in the preface to which they say :—

"It was the purpose and desire of the authour of this treatise to have published his judgment on the whole book of the Revelation ; but through the malice of the Prelates, who divers times spoiled him of his goods and kept him many years in prison, he was prevented of his purpose. After his death, some of his labours coming to the hands of his friends in scattered and imperfect papers, they laboured with the help of others that heard him declare his judgment herein to set forth this little treatise."

He evidently suffered grievously. Edmond Jessop looked back to him as an "ancient stout Separatist,"<sup>2</sup> and declared that he held the view that fresh Apostles would be sent in time to set Christ's Church in order. We may recall the fact that when the *Mayflower* sailed there were some from Essex, the scene of Wilkinson's labours, who joined in that amazing venture.

<sup>1</sup> There is a copy in the Bodleian Library.

<sup>2</sup> Jessop's *Discovery*, 1623, p. 77.

## CHAPTER XXII

### LITERARY ACTIVITY OF MURTON AND HIS ASSOCIATES— MURTON AND ROBINSON

WHILE the opponents of the English Anabaptists were active in writing against them they themselves were not slow to defend their position. In 1615 they issued a book in which they answered such objections as were urged against their principle that persecution for religion was wrong. This book bears no name. It is addressed "to all that truly wish Jerusalem's prosperity and Babylon's destruction." The prefatory epistle is subscribed "by Christ's unworthy witnesses, His Majesty's faithful subjects commonly (but most falsely) called Anabaptists." Under that title we have John Murton and his friends. Dr. Underhill has pointed out the resemblance between parts of this work and passages in "A Description of what God hath predestinated concerning Man," issued in 1620, and ascribed by John Robinson to "John Murton and his associates." Murton probably submitted the manuscript to his fellow believers before sending it over into Holland to be printed. The title of the first edition of 1615 runs: "Objections answered by way of Dialogue wherein is proved: By the Law of God: By the Law of our Land: And by his Ma<sup>ties</sup> many testimonies, that no man ought to be persecuted for his religion, so he testifie his

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

allegiance by the Oath appointed by Law.”<sup>1</sup> This work takes the form of a forcible dialogue between “Antichristian,” representing the party of the persecuting bishops, “Christian,” under which name the authors speak, and an “Indifferent Man” who is duly brought to see “that none ought to be compelled by any worldly means to worship God.” The strong grasp which these men had upon the principle of religious liberty is shown in their readiness to tolerate Roman Catholics, who were at this time in extreme disfavour with Englishmen owing to the recent Gunpowder Plot. “For the papists,” say these men, “may it not justly be suspected that one chief cause of all their treasons, hath been because of all the compulsions that have been used against their consciences, in compelling them to the worship practised in public, according to the law of this land, which, being taken away, there is no doubt but they would be much more peaceable.”<sup>2</sup>

Besides considering in this dialogue the objections urged against abandoning the practice of persecution, the authors state that they have also “with good consciences pointed at the principal things of Mr. Robinson’s late book till further time.”<sup>3</sup> They refer to Robinson’s book of the preceding year “Of Religious Communion, &c., with the silencing of the clamours raised by Mr. Thomas Helwisse against our retaining the Baptism received in England.” Robinson held that the magistrate might use his lawful power not merely in civil affairs but also “for the furtherance of Christ’s

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted in *Tracts on Liberty of Conscience*, edited by E. B. Underhill, 1846.

<sup>2</sup> *Tracts on Liberty of Conscience*, 1846, p. 114.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.



## Laymen May Baptize

kingdom and laws." This opinion is glanced at in the dialogue, where reference is made to "some that make more show of religion than you [churchmen] do, although themselves be now persecuted, yet if Kings were of their minds would be as cruel as you for they maintain the same thing."

The writer or writers maintain the positions of Helwys in reference to the right of any Christian disciple to baptize. "We and others affirm, that any disciple of Christ in what part of the world soever, coming to the Lord's way, he by the word and spirit of God preaching that way unto others and converting; he may and ought also to baptize them."<sup>1</sup> They also agree that flight in persecution is unlawful, and refer to their confession, published four years before (1611) for their opinion about the person of Christ and the lawfulness of magistracy. They recognise that many called Anabaptists held contrary opinions to theirs upon these points and "many other strange things." They rejected the name "Anabaptist" and did not regard themselves as a sect. "Well, you will yet be called Anabaptists," says the Indifferent Man, "because you deny baptism to infants." The rejoinder is:—"So were Christians before us called sects: and so they may [call] John Baptist, Jesus Christ himself, and his apostles Anabaptists; for we profess and practice no otherwise herein than they, namely, the baptizing of such as confess with the mouth the belief of the heart."<sup>2</sup> This dialogue did not contain the whole of the reply of Murton and his fellow Anabaptists to Robinson. It was only to serve

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

# Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

“till further time” when the deep question of predestination was to be handled.

## SUPPLICATION TO PARLIAMENT

The cause of religious liberty made little or no headway under the rule of James. No Parliament was called after the brief session in 1614 for seven years. At length James had to give way to the popular demand and summon a new Parliament. The growing resentment against the despotic rule of the Crown emboldened the Nonconformists and Separatists to protest against the hardships inflicted upon them. With the Englishman's usual faith in Parliament the company of Anabaptists under John Murton drew up and presented “A Most Humble Supplication” to the King, Prince Charles and the Nobility, Judges and Gentry of the new Parliament. They asked for redress of grievances, set forth their special opinions and repeated their arguments against “persecution for cause of conscience.” The difficulties under which they laboured are disclosed in the following passage :—

“Our miseries are long and lingering imprisonments for many years in divers counties of England, in which many have died and left behind them widows, and many small children : taking away our goods, and others the like, of which we can make good probation ; not for any disloyalty to your majesty, nor hurt to any mortal man, our adversaries themselves being judges ; but only because we dare not assent unto and practise in the worship of God such things as we have not faith in, because it is sin against the Most High.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Tracts on Liberty of Conscience*, p. 190.

# Murton and the Scriptures

## MURTON AND THE SCRIPTURES

The attitude of this group of English Anabaptists towards the Bible is clearly set out in this supplication. They grounded their faith upon the Scriptures interpreted by the Spirit of God given to the faithful. The propositions dealt with in the first four chapters make this plain :—

“(i) The rule of faith is the doctrine of the Holy Ghost contained in the sacred scriptures, and not any church, council, prince, or potentate, nor any mortal man whatsoever.

“(ii) The interpreter of this rule is the scriptures and Spirit of God in whomsoever.

“(iii) That the Spirit of God to understand and interpret the scriptures is given to all and every particular person that fear and obey God, of what degree soever they be; and not to the wicked.

“(iv) Those that fear and obey God and so have the Spirit of God to search out and know the mind of God in the scriptures, are commonly and for the most part, the simple, poor, despised, &c.”

They contended that this was no private spirit but the universal Spirit of God. “God’s Spirit is not private, for it is not comprehended only within one place, person or time, as man’s is, but it is universal and eternal.”

## JOHN COTTON AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

The “Humble Supplication” did not have any effect upon King and Parliament, but it was destined to bear fruit in an unexpected quarter. The arguments against persecution for cause of conscience which it contained were written out and sent to John Cotton, of Boston, about the year 1635 by Mr. Hall, minister at Roxbury, in New England. The main question was “whether

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

persecution for cause of conscience be not against the doctrine of Jesus Christ the King of Kings?" Cotton considered the arguments adduced and returned a letter in which he asserted the legitimacy of persecuting in cases of persistent error in fundamental and principal points of doctrine and worship. The writer of the "Supplication" had quoted from ancient and recent writers on his side. Mr. Cotton "to shut up this argument from testimony of writers" instances those who defended persecution, and mentions Calvin, "who procured the death of Michael Servetus for pertinacity in heresy, and defended his fact by a book written of that argument." The arguments against persecution were printed together with Cotton's reply under the title "The Controversy concerning Liberty of Conscience in Matters of Religion truly stated." Hall sent this on to Roger Williams, who wrote a long and forcible answer to Cotton and published it when he came to London, in 1644, to negotiate for a charter for Rhode Island. The book was anonymous and bore the title "The Bloody Tenent of Persecution, for cause of Conscience discussed in a conference between Truth and Peace."

Roger Williams was deeply impressed by the arguments for liberty extracted from the "Humble Supplication" of 1620. He made inquiry when in London as to the author, and this is the story he was told:—

"The author of these arguments against persecution . . . being committed by some then in power close prisoner in Newgate, for the witness of some truths of Jesus, and having not the use of pen and ink, wrote these arguments in milk, in sheets of paper brought to him by the woman his keeper from a friend in London as the stopples of his milk bottle. In such paper written

# Literary Activity of the Anabaptists

with milk nothing will appear, but the way of reading it by fire being known to this friend who received the papers he transcribed and kept together the papers." <sup>1</sup>

It would have been some consolation to the author could he have known that his work was destined to influence the framing of the constitution of a State across the sea in which "the Saints of the Most High were to walk without molestation in the name of Jehovah their God for ever and ever."

## LITERARY ACTIVITY OF THE ANABAPTISTS

We have one or two further glimpses of Murton's Church, and examples of other books testifying to the literary activity of himself and his friends. On July 30, 1618, we find Sir Robert Naunton writing to the Lord Mayor of London stating that the Lords of the Council had "heard of a confluence of loose people about Crosby House upon a Conventicle of Anabaptists there assembled." <sup>2</sup> It would be unsafe to decide off-hand from this statement that this was a conventicle of Murton's company, for the word "Anabaptist" was used in a rough-and-ready way for any kind of Separatist, but it may indicate the locality of one of its places of meeting. Francis Johnson took notice of the growth of Anabaptist ideas at this period. He included in his "Christian Plea," "printed in the yeere of our Lord 1617," a treatise "Touching the Anabaptists and others

<sup>1</sup> *Bloody Tenent*, p. 36. Hanserd Knollys Society's publications, 1845.

<sup>2</sup> *Remembrancia*, *City of London*, 1878, p. 453. Evans quotes from *Truth's Victory*, 1645, p. 19, the words: "Some thirty years ago Mr. Morton, a teacher of a church of Anabaptists in Newgate," and this has been taken to indicate the place of meeting. I think it must refer to an imprisonment of Murton in Newgate about 1615. The church probably met in the houses of its members in the East End of London.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

mainteyning some like errorrs with them," in which he treated at length of infant baptism, "considering how great the error is in the denial thereof, and how greatly it spreadeth both in these parts [Amsterdam] and (of late) in our own country." <sup>1</sup> The strength of the Baptist position, according to the general principles of the Reformation, and the increasing number of those who avowed Baptist opinions are alike borne witness to by the many books written in opposition at this period.

Murton for his part was not inactive. He wrote in 1617 a little volume entitled "Truth's Champion" which was more than once reprinted. "It is written," <sup>2</sup> says Crosby, "in a very good style and the arguments are managed with a great deal of art and skill." It contained thirteen chapters, maintaining the Arminian or Remonstrant scheme of doctrine in opposition to Calvinism, and dealing with such topics as "free will," "election," "love," "baptism," "Christ dying for all to save all." Crosby says this book was found when they were demolishing an old wall near Colchester at the beginning of the Civil Wars. It had probably been sent down to one of John Wilkinson's flock there. Francis Smith, the General Baptist printer, advertising the third edition of this work in 1678, says, "The copy of this book was found hid in an old wall near Colchester, in Essex." <sup>3</sup>

There is also reference to a book on Baptism, translated from the Dutch in 1618, <sup>4</sup> in which Murton and his

<sup>1</sup> *Christian Plea*, 1617, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Crosby, *History of the Baptists* i., p. 276.

<sup>3</sup> Advertisements at end of Grantham's *Christianismus Primitivus*, 1678.

<sup>4</sup> See Crosby, i., p. 129, who gives the Eight Propositions containing the argument of this "Plain and well grounded treatise concerning Baptism." The seventh proposition was "That the baptism of infants and sucklings



## Predestination Discussed

friends probably had a hand. He refers to it in a work issued two years later, for which he was undoubtedly responsible. There he makes Ereunetes, one of the characters in the dialogue, say:—

“I have, not long since, seene a Booke translated out of Dutch and Printed in English proving that this invention of Infants baptisme was brought in and declared by divers Emperors Popes and Counsels.”<sup>1</sup>

That extract is taken from the important book entitled “A Description of what God hath Predestinated concerning man, in his creation, transgression, regeneration . . . as also an Answer to John Robinson touching Baptisme . . . Printed 1620.” This work is given in dialogue form, the speakers being:

Ereunetes } a { Searcher  
Odegos } { Guide

A note at the end asks for

“A serious consideration of what is written and if any defects bee either in Printing or binding (both which unto us are difficult)

---

is a ceremony and ordinance of man brought into the church by teachers after the apostles' time, and instituted and *commanded by councils, popes, and emperors.*” I have sought in vain for copies of *Truth's Champion* and of this “Treatise.” I have had to content myself with consulting the answer to the latter by “Thomas Cobbet, Teacher of the Church of Lyn in New England,” and I doubt whether Crosby had anything else before him in giving his information about it. Cobbet wrote his *Just Vindication of the Covenant and Church-Estate of Children of Church Members* in 1646 in answer to John Spilsbury, Christopher Blackwood, Henry Den, and A. R. It was printed in 1648 and Cobbet annexed to it “A Refutation of a certain pamphlet styled ‘The plain and wel-grounded Treatise touching Baptism.’” This was anonymous. Cobbet refers to those who published it as “The authors or translators of a booke of some unknowne Author or Authors” and politely calls them “Mountebank deceivers and probably some Jesuited cheaters” (p. 284). The plan of the book was to bring testimonies from the fathers and reformers to show the late introduction of infant baptism into the church. The argument was sound, but the authors weakened their case by dragging in disingenuous quotations which Cobbet easily exposed.

<sup>1</sup> *A Description of what God hath Predestinated*, p. 154.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

wee pray the one may be passed over and th'other may be amended."

Perhaps the difficulty in binding may account for the fact that the copies in the Bodleian and British Museum Libraries have pages missing; the copy in the University Library at Cambridge appears to be perfect. It bears no author's name, the Epistle to the Reader being signed:

"Yours ready to doe you any good the servants of Christ falsly called

"ANA BAPTISTS."

but in Robinson's reply to this work he unhesitatingly ascribes it to "John Murton and his associates." It is written with spirit, especially in the last sections answering "A little printed writing of John Robinson's touching Baptism." The earlier part of the book opposes the Calvinistic doctrines of Predestination, Election, and Reprobation and asserts the doctrine of general redemption and "free choyce" a term which the author favours rather than "free will."

"I hold" <sup>1</sup> says he "that there is yet left in man the faculty of will to choose or refuse as I will make plain:— (1) By many Scriptures; (2) By many undeniable reasons."

In addition to quoting Scripture Murton appeals to "common experience," <sup>2</sup> and in such an argument as the following we see how he rationalises the ordinary crude doctrine concerning hell torments.

"That worm of Conscience that sticketh so deep in the souls of all damned creatures should never appear in hell, if men were

<sup>1</sup> *A Description what, etc.*, p. 95.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

## Appeal to Experience

deprived of liberty. For their torment consisteth in this, that for their own demerits, being created of God in such sort that if they would Heaven laid open for them by accepting God's grace through faith and obedience to the gospel, and yet they cast themselves into hell of their own accord through unbelief and rebellion."<sup>1</sup>

The opinion about the divine origin of the soul which struck John Wilkinson as curious is here reasserted :—

"The soul comes from God, the matter of the body from the parents. The soul is very good coming from God. The body hath not sinned till it be infected with the soul by transgression of a law."<sup>2</sup>

We are introduced in this book to a paper by Robinson, otherwise unknown, on the subject of baptism and its administration. Murton leads up to it in a pleasant way. After representing Ereunetes as satisfied that there is no warrant for infant baptism he makes him continue as follows :—

"I am every way satisfied in this [that infant baptism is a late invention] only Iohn Robinson, Preacher to the English at Leyden hath printed half a sheet of paper who laboureth to prove that none may baptize but Pastors and Elders of a Church (for other officers to baptize I conceive not that he meaneth) and consequently that you [Murton and his Church] and all your companies in England wanting Pastors, are unbaptized."<sup>3</sup>

We may gather from this that there were already companies of Anabaptists, holding similar views to those of Murton, in other parts than London.

In his half sheet of paper Robinson set out "Grounds and Proofes" "that all y<sup>t</sup> have beene baptised by any

<sup>1</sup> P. 105.

<sup>2</sup> P. 120.

<sup>3</sup> P. 154.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

but a pastor are Vnbaptised." He laid down two propositions :—

(1) "That there is no lawful Baptism but by him that hath a lawful calling to baptize."

(2) "That only he hath an ordinary lawful calling to baptize who is called thereto by the Church."

From these propositions he drew the conclusion, says Murton, "that all those (and consequently we) not being baptized by any so called, but by those they conceive converted them by their gift, are unlawfully baptized and so unbaptized persons."<sup>1</sup> Against Robinson's view Murton maintained "that any disciple of Christ that hath received power and commandment from God to preach and convert, though no pastor, may also by the same power and commandment baptize."<sup>2</sup>

Robinson stood out for the necessity of the administrator being definitely called by the Church to the work of baptizing. Such "a lawful ordinary calling to baptize" he says "their first baptizer Mr. Smith had not, neither have they that now administer baptism amongst them, neither do they account that more is requisite for power and right to baptize than a personal gift of teaching and making thereby one of their proselytes and supposed converts."<sup>3</sup> We also gather from Robinson's criticism that Murton and his friends, on converting any one, baptized them privately, regarding the rite as "no church action but personal only." This supports the contention that John Smith's baptism was a domestic rite administered by affusion and not by dipping in stream or sea or

<sup>1</sup> *A Description what, etc.*, p. 165.

<sup>2</sup> P. 154. See also Robinson, *Works*, i., p. 446.

<sup>3</sup> Robinson, *Defence of Doctrine of Synod of Dort*, 1624, p. 446.

## Robinson Renounces his Ordination

lake. Robinson expressly mentions J. M[urton] as baptizing alone<sup>1</sup> and declared that the practice of his Church in allowing baptism to be administered "by persons uncalled thereunto, either by God immediately or mediately by the church, or otherwise than by their own particular and personal motion" was "singular from all other of their sect in all places."<sup>2</sup> The Dutch Menonites, as we have seen, only allowed duly ordained elders or ministers to baptize.

Murton skilfully turns against Robinson his own words, by which he justified his renunciation of the ordination he received in the Church of England. Dr. William Ames had penned a "Manuduction" to lead on John Robinson, from the acknowledgment that private communion with godly members of the Church of England was allowable, to the recognition of public communion with them in acts of worship. This step Robinson refused to take. He wrote in reply a "Manumission" to this "Manuduction" in which he declared in forcible words that it was necessary to renounce "orders" received from a bishop, and that it was impossible to "repent," as the Puritan preachers put it, of the errors involved in episcopal ordination. Yet he retained his baptism received in the Church which he now counted a false Church, and declared that this baptism was subsequently rendered valid by his repentance. Murton quickly seized the opening here offered and in a spirited passage applied Robinson's argument against the retention of "orders" to the case of his retaining baptism administered in the Anglican Church.

Though Robinson looked down with a superior air

<sup>1</sup> Robinson, *Works*, i., p. 449.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 451.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

upon Murton and his Church, calling them "poor seduced souls," "these malaperts," "deceitful proctors," and so on, yet he found their book of sufficient importance to answer at length. His reply was not printed till 1624. It is a weighty production, bearing the title "A Defence of the Doctrine propounded by the Synod at Dort against John Murton and his associates . . . with the refutation of their answer to a writing touching baptism."<sup>1</sup> This work indicates in more places than one that Robinson had a close knowledge of those who adhered to Helwys and Murton. It confirms me in the conviction that he was born and bred in the locality from which many of them sprang. He speaks of "the profession of the knowledge and obedience of the gospel which these men have made so many years both in the Church of England and elsewhere."<sup>2</sup> In a striking passage he makes an impassioned appeal to these old acquaintances :—

"Oh! you the followers of these guides, yea, you the guides yourselves, call to remembrance the days of your ignorance and profaneness specially divers of you, before your first conversion to the Lord : and consider whether you were not deeper rooted in sin than many others who yet have not received the grace, which you have done, to believe and repent ; and give the glory to God's grace and not to your own free will that you believe, repent, and obey rather than they. Be not unmindful of this unspeakable mercy of God towards you above others equal and above you, in the enjoying of outward means, lest it come to appear in time that you were never indeed partakers thereof."<sup>3</sup>

The intimate way in which Robinson wrote of the members of the Gainsborough and Scrooby Churches

<sup>1</sup> Robinson, *Works*, Ashton's reprint, i., p. 261.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 398.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 316.



## Robinson's Parentage and Birthplace

was one of the reasons which led me to look to that locality as the place of his old home. There has been much conjecture about his origin. The latest writer on the subject<sup>1</sup> favours the suggestion of Dr. John Brown that he was the son of the Rev. John Robinson, D.D., of Lincoln. This is incorrect. Both Robinson and his wife Bridget lived at Sturton le Steeple, Nottinghamshire. I have been successful in establishing that point. His father, John Robinson,<sup>2</sup> was a substantial yeoman. Besides John, the pastor of the Pilgrim Fathers, he had another son, William, and a daughter Mary. By his will, and also to a greater extent by the will of his wife Ann, his son John Robinson received bequests. His little grandson, John, at Leyden, and the other children in the pastor's family were not forgotten. Bridget Robinson came of a well-to-do family of a similar rank in life, but apparently of greater estate. She was the second daughter of Alexander and Eleanor White of Sturton le Steeple, and had many brothers and sisters. Considerations of space will not allow me to set out here the entire results of my researches on this point, but the determination of Robinson's parentage and the locality of the home of his boyhood helps us to understand his close personal knowledge of the character and history of those who gathered about John Smith and accompanied him in his exile.

It was not only among the Separatists at Leyden that Murton's book created interest; those at Amsterdam were also stirred up about the points with which it dealt. Henry Ainsworth was asked his judgment about

<sup>1</sup> Burrage, *New Facts concerning John Robinson*, 1910, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Wills in District Registry at York, Vol. 33, fo. 236, Vol. 34, fo. 324.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

it; accordingly he wrote in reply "A Seasonable Discourse or a Censure upon a Dialogue of the Anabaptists intituled a Description of what God hath predestinated concerning Man." This answer, he tells us, "he soon drew out . . . and sent it by a friend into England to reclaim (if God saw it good) such as had erred herein and gone astray by rash and inconsiderate zeal beyond knowledge."<sup>1</sup> It must have been one of the last works of Ainsworth's life, for he died in 1622. It remained in manuscript for some years, but John Robinson had access to a copy, as he refers more than once to the answer which Ainsworth<sup>2</sup> had made to Murton's arguments. More than half of Ainsworth's reply was taken up by a defence of the doctrine of original sin and an assertion of the necessity for baptizing infants. He was not careful to distinguish the remainder of Smith's company at Amsterdam from the Church under Murton for he quoted the conclusion of the former that "original sin is an idle term" as though it were the opinion of the latter, declaring that on this point they held "more erroneously than the very Papists."<sup>3</sup> Anabaptists contended that infants are innocent of sin, and "may not be baptized because there is neither commandment, example nor true consequence for it in all Christ's perfect Testament." Against these positions Ainsworth argued with all the force at his command. The terms in which the latter position was set out became a stock phrase. As early as 1615 Helwys and Murton had declared<sup>4</sup> "there is neither plain command nor example" for infant

<sup>1</sup> *A Seasonable Discourse*, edition 1644. Address to Reader, Sig. A 2.

<sup>2</sup> Robinson, *Works*, i., pp. 405, 411.

<sup>3</sup> Ainsworth's *Censure*, p. 29.

<sup>4</sup> *Objections Answered, etc.*, 1615.

## Ainsworth Opposes Murton

baptism "in Christ's Testament," and the upholders of the custom only supported it as a "consequence of circumcision" appointed in the "covenant with Abraham and his seed." Then, in 1620,<sup>1</sup> we find John Murton declaring that there is "neither commandment, example, nor *true* consequence for it in all Christ's Testament which is perfect." Ainsworth, as we see, singled this statement out for censure. Then again, in a letter dated from London, May 10, 1622, full of echoes of Murton's opinions, but simply signed "H. H.," we have the same conclusion stated in similar terms. "There is," says the writer, "neither command, example, or just consequence [from the Scriptures] for infants' baptism; but [only] for the baptizing of believers." This letter fell into hostile hands, and was made the text for a book against this group of Anabaptists. To this fact we owe its preservation. One I. P., supposed to be John Preston, published it in full in 1623 in a work<sup>2</sup> entitled "Anabaptisme's Myserie of Iniquity Unmasked." He severely criticised this Anabaptist separation from the Anglican Church, and gave this letter, which he declares was "indited by a principal Elder in and of that Separation," as a sample of the singular teaching of these people.

<sup>1</sup> *A Description of what God hath Predestinated*, p. 131.

<sup>2</sup> British Museum Library, 4323, a. 40.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### JESSOP'S DISCOVERY OF THE ERRORS OF THE ENGLISH ANABAPTISTS

ANOTHER book throwing light upon the opinions of this society of English Baptists was issued in 1623 "by Edmond Jessop, who sometime walked . . . with them." He called his work "A Discovery of the Errors of the English Anabaptists . . . wherein is set downe all their severall and maine points of error which they hold, with a full answer to every one of them severally wherein the truth is manifested." If it was difficult for Murton and his friends to get their books printed, it was easy and safe to publish books against them. Jessop had no need to go to Holland for a printer. His book was printed in London by W. Jones and openly sold in Cheapside by Robert Bird at the sign of the Bible. It was dedicated "to his most excellent dread soveraigne Lord James King of England, Scotland, France, and Ireland," a contrast to the phrasing of the dedication to the King indited by Helwys. The scope of this book will be sufficiently indicated by Jessop's own summary. His account is valuable as coming from one who had an inside acquaintance with the position of Murton and Helwys, but we must bear in mind as we read that it is given from the point of view of an opponent. The careful reader will notice the prepotency

# Jessop's Summary of Anabaptist Belief

of Smith's ideas over those of Helwys in this summary in two or three particulars, an indication that John Murton kept closer to their old leader than Helwys had done. There was no personal antagonism between them to accentuate differences. Jessop sets out in a table<sup>1</sup> the principal points of Anabaptist belief which are handled in his book, viz. :—

1. "That God did not predestinate all men to be saved upon condition that they repent and believe the Gospel.

2. "That God did not elect before all time to grace and life any particular persons, but in time he doth elect qualities, as faith and obedience, and then finding these qualities in men he doth elect their persons for the qualities' sake.

3. "That all men have free will in themselves as well to repent of their sins to believe the Gospel and obtain salvation, as they have to remain in hardness of heart and unbelief and in the estate of damnation.

4. "That the stedfastness of man's justification and salvation doth depend upon his own will in continuing in the act of believing and works of righteousness. And that such as have faith in Christ Jesus, regenerate persons having their names written in the book of life, may fall away from all, may become unregenerate and have their names razed out of the book of life again and perish. And that God doth alter and change his purpose and promise and come to hate and reject such as he hath formerly loved and justified.

5. "That there is no original sin, but that all children of all manner of people in the world as well heathens as infidels, idolaters, worshippers of devils, all kind of blasphemers, fornicators, and unclean persons whatsoever (as of the faithful) are free from all pollution of sin both in the conception and birth, and dying before they commit actual sins are saved.

6. "That none ought to be baptized but such men and women of years only as have attained to true repentance and justifying faith being both in the account of the church and in the sight of God regenerate persons. And that the baptism of children used

<sup>1</sup> Back of title-page of Jessop's *Discovery*.

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is no baptism at all, but is the 'marke of the beast' spoken of in Revelation xiii.

7. "That the Church of England is a false and Antichristian Church and ought to be separated from. As also a touch of the errors of the Familists.

8. "And that a King or Magistrate cannot be a true Christian except he give over his Kingly office or magistracy."

The copy of Jessop's book in the Bodleian Library is of exceptional interest, because it has been profusely annotated with marginal notes in a contemporary hand by one of the members of what Jessop calls "this little silly sect of English Anabaptists." Unfortunately the margins have been badly cropped in binding, and several pages are missing at the end of this copy, but the manuscript notes that are legible show that the writer was a strong opponent of predestination, an upholder of free choice and adult baptism, one who opposed persecution for matters of religion and maintained the right of any body of people newly awakened to the truth to form a Church without going to the Churches of England or Rome for authority. If this critic of Jessop's book were not John Murton himself, it was some one thoroughly well acquainted with Murton's opinions and writings.

Let us take one or two examples *literatim*, supplying missing parts in brackets. There are allusions to persecution which these Anabaptists were still enduring. Referring to the true members of the State Church to which he had returned, Jessop says in figurative scriptural language made familiar to him in his intimate association with the Anabaptists: "If Christ hunger they feed him, if he thirst they give to drink, if he be naked they clothe him, if he be sick or in prison



## Manuscript Notes on Jessop's Book

they visit him"; against this is written, "Rather take bread from hym and spoyleth hym and make hym naked and sick by prisoning and impoverishing and punishing of his discyples."<sup>1</sup> Again the marginal note is added to another passage, "The time of persecution continueth yet, it is not over."<sup>2</sup> When Jessop says, "We should learne to know the Lord," his Anabaptist critic writes in the margin, "learne! can we learne more than we are ordayned to learne?" intimating that if that be so Jessop's case for predestination falls to the ground. Jessop argues against the possibility of "the elect" falling away from God. "The sanctified servants of God . . . go on from faith to faith, never giving over nor turning back, nor falling away from the living God" to which the annotator says, "As you have done from y<sup>e</sup> truth you once held going farther and farther from y<sup>e</sup> truth of God."<sup>3</sup> He further says of Jessop that "he went out from y<sup>m</sup> y<sup>t</sup> had y<sup>e</sup> truth and turned back agayne to error."<sup>4</sup> Commenting on another passage he says, "The Church of England used tyranny also [compelling] men gaynst their consciences to submit to errors, 'tis tyranny to deprive men of their worldly goods much more to deprive them of theyr heavenly."<sup>5</sup>

Jessop devoted a good deal of space to a consideration of the question as to how a new Christian Church could possibly be set up. Were they to wait for new apostles to appear to re-constitute the Church, as some maintained, or should they not rather regard the larger historic Churches of Christendom as true Churches after

<sup>1</sup> MS. note to Bodleian copy of Jessop's *Discovery*, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 74.

<sup>3</sup> P. 35.

<sup>4</sup> P. 36.

<sup>5</sup> P. 87.

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all? If they were going to start afresh, who would ordain their Elder or Minister? "Where will you find an Eldership to ordaine him?"<sup>1</sup>

"Foolish questions," says the annotator, "founded on error dost thou think christ [would] build his church on Antychristian errors, and his Ministry hold and have Antychristian offices and ordynances, as if christ's church of ye new Testament were nowe to be found?" That is to say, the form of the Church was clearly set out in the New Testament, and there was no need to go hunting for it now, the faithful simply had to come together and follow the New Testament model and set up the Church anew themselves. To those who were expecting new Apostles Jessop said, "Who shall send them? Christ is ascended and he doth not now appear to call and send any as he did the Apostle Paul. And Apostles be such as come from the presence of the Lord and have seen him."<sup>2</sup> Against this is written: "Is there no [calling] but from y<sup>e</sup> church of Rome? is y<sup>e</sup> church of Rome the true church as your Apostate brother Francis John[son]<sup>3</sup> holdeth."

Johnson in his last book, in order to avoid the Anabaptist argument that baptism in a false Church was no baptism at all, withdrew from his earlier contention

<sup>1</sup> Jessop, p. 76, and MS. note.

<sup>2</sup> Jessop's *Discovery*, p. 77.

<sup>3</sup> Compare with this note a passage in Murton's *Description of what God hath Predestinated*, 1620, p. 153, where he is arguing against putting infant baptism in the place of circumcision and learning Christ of Moses, the Gospel of the Law. "What is the issue of all this? Truth and experience teacheth—a necessitie of maintayning that harlot and strumpet Rome to be God's church and people, as that apostate Fran. Johnson and others have done as indeed it cannot be avoyded."

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and acknowledged the Church of Rome to be a true, though corrupt, Church.

"If thou saist," continues Jessop, "the Church may ordain new Elders, I aske, whence came that Church? Who planted it first?" The manuscript note in the margin replies, "I answer christ and his apostles planted his church first which was dryven into y<sup>e</sup> wilderness and ther yet remayneth by reason of [persecution] yet y<sup>e</sup> remnant of her seed may keep the commandements of God and the testimony of theyr lord and master Jesus Christ without y<sup>e</sup> officers [or] ordynances and test[ify to the truth.]"<sup>1</sup>

The page on which Jessop refers to the se-baptism of Smith is unfortunately so closely cut that his critic's comment at the foot of the page is mutilated, but its general drift is clear. Jessop says, "If<sup>2</sup> I should now demand of you your warrant for a man to baptize himselfe, I must marvell where you would find such a practise in all the new testament of Christ.—Mr. Smith baptized himself first and then Mr. Helwis and John Morton with the rest." To this his reader rejoins, "Also I ask of you if John Bap. baptized hymself (if yea<sup>3</sup>) where do you fynde it written? Then also why may not chr. discp. (being unbaptised), baptise himself . . . as he did whenas all men are unbaptised? If you say John was baptis. . . ." [the remainder of the question is lost at the foot of the page.]

The writer evidently justified Smith in his act of

<sup>1</sup> Jessop's *Discovery*, p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> *Discovery*, p. 65, and margin.

<sup>3</sup> The MS. seems to read "yea," but "nay" is clearly meant.

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self-baptism from the example of John the Baptist. There was no passage of scripture to indicate that John had not baptized himself, so it was open to Christ's disciples to recover that rite for themselves in case of need.

There is one comment of this anonymous annotator which indicates that some attention was now being given to the method of baptizing. Assuming him to have made his remarks on this book soon after its publication, and from their freshness and force I take this to have been the case, then this note forms one of the earliest indications that the English Anabaptists were considering the right manner of administering baptism. In later days they came to practice immersion instead of baptizing by affusion and symbolic washing. They appear to have been influenced by two reasons, one etymological, the other scriptural. They became convinced that the signification of the word "baptize" was "to dip," and the idea expressed by St. Paul of being buried with Christ in baptism and rising to walk in newness of life (Rom. vi. 4; Col. ii. 12) gradually overpowered the idea of cleansing which had hitherto been more prominently associated in their minds with the baptismal rite. When the Particular Baptists adopted the practice of immersion in 1640-41, the General Baptists, re-enforced by a large number of fresh adherents, appear to have soon adopted the same method.

The comment to which I refer is made on a passage in which Jessop argues, "that the baptism of children neither is nor can be the mark of the Beast spoken of in Rev. xiii. 16, for that . . . is such a thing (indeed) as

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young children are not capable of." To this his opponent rejoins :—

"[Y<sup>e</sup>] baptisme of christ is [such a] thing whereof [infan]ts are not capabl. [If] it were [use]d and practised on them they wold [be dro]wned as many [have] been as historys [not]es therefore a new [mo-]tion is found for them [nam]ely to sprinkle theyr [head] instead of dipping [which] y<sup>e</sup> word baptisme [signi]-fyeth."<sup>1</sup>

This is too slender a basis to support an assertion that this group of baptized believers practised immersion in or about the year 1625, but it points to the fact that attention was being paid to the more limited meaning of the word "baptize" in the sense of "dip."

<sup>1</sup> Jessop's *Discovery*, p. 68, and MS. note.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN ENGLISH AND DUTCH ANABAPTISTS

THE return of Helwys and Murton with their company of fellow believers to England was an important incident for the after history of the General Baptists. It not only gave an impetus to the spread of the principles and doctrines advocated in their confession of faith, but it afforded an organized society to which those of like mind could attach themselves. We soon find groups of Anabaptists gathered into worshipping societies in different districts in England to which refugees from Amsterdam returned. The returning Anabaptists were full of zeal for the cause. We read of "the multitudes of their disciples,"<sup>1</sup> and though that is an alarmist phrase it is clear that they made headway.

No records of the Church of Helwys and Murton are known to exist, but Dr. Müller discovered some letters<sup>2</sup> amongst the archives of the Amsterdam Mennonites which throw light upon its condition and beliefs. These letters were occasioned by a small secession. As so often happens in a Church which fosters strong individuality, a difference of opinion arose. Sixteen members under Elias Tookey were excommunicated by Murton's

<sup>1</sup> *Anabaptismes Myserie*, 1623, p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> The correspondence is printed in Evans' *Early Baptists*, ii., pp. 21 - 51.



## Elias Tookey

Church, but continued to meet together and celebrated the Lord's Supper amongst themselves. In order to strengthen their position they applied to be received into communion by the United Waterlander Mennonite Church at Amsterdam. They would know that the remainders of Smith's company had been accepted by that Church early in 1615, and this would give them good hope of being admitted to fellowship with the Amsterdam Church. The response was friendly, but displayed a characteristic caution. The Dutchmen wanted to know more about the opinions of Tookey and his friends, who appear to have been ready to tolerate a wide divergence of opinion so long as the Christian spirit and a holy life were maintained. The brethren at Amsterdam regarded the "breaking of bread" by this little company of seceders as disorderly, holding that this could only be done by an ordained elder or minister. What about fleeing in time of persecution? What opinions about the person of Christ are held and tolerated by you? What about the oath and magistracy? Such were the questions upon which the Mennonites desired satisfaction.

As soon as the letter containing these inquiries came to hand Tookey and his friends "immediately assembled in order to consider what answer should be sent." Their letter, dated from London, January 3, 1624, has been preserved. They say:—

"We are still of opinion that a private brother is allowed to minister the sacraments when the congregation calls him to it, though he be not in possession of the ministerial office; on condition, however, that the church has no minister, for, if it have, we think that a private brother may by no means do it. . . . We do not think it objectionable to flee in time of persecution to

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other countries and live there. Many among us now were of opinion that it was. We do not think that the holy and peaceful doctrine of toleration is misused if some remain in our communion (if they are quiet) who know not yet what they should think of Christ's deity. . . . Further we inform you that there is nobody amongst us who denies the deity of Christ; but there are two or three who have a somewhat different opinion than we maintain in general, though we think that after all it comes to the same end."

These two or three understood the deity of Christ as being—

"The natural emanation (just as the light of the sun) out of the eternal substance and that this emanation takes place also in many other cases . . . it is God-like strength, wisdom, mercy, justice, &c., &c. . . . that God has sent out to make the world and reconcile fallen man. . . . And shall we condemn each other for these opinions? That be far from us. But if we see that some crucify Christ or the Godlike nature which they partake of, by the wickedness of sin, then we condemn them, as we surely know that the Word of God has already condemned them."

Here again it is seen that unorthodox opinions concerning the person of Christ were prevalent amongst the English Anabaptists, but there is no clear trace as yet of the Socinian position being held or tolerated by them.

The letter goes on to point out that "refusing an oath would be guilty or hurtful in our country, as some would think we refused the oath of allegiance to our king." The writers so far concede to the opinion of the Mennonites upon magistracy and the profession of arms as to say that they will "neither take nor assume one of them," and they bring their letter to a close by asking the Amsterdam Church, should they be accepted into communion "to write a few words to John Murton and his friends in order to augment peace and welfare," and

## Letters to Holland

also to satisfy two of their number upon the question of "succession from the time of the apostles."

More correspondence followed. A long letter from Amsterdam in May, 1624, "Signed with the consent and allowance of the ministers and servants of the Dutch and English Churches of Jesus Christ in that place," enables us to trace the general course of the negotiations for union. From this letter we gather that Tookey and his friends had sent messengers over into Holland to ask the judgment and advice of the Mennonite Church upon the differences between themselves and Murton's Church. But the Dutch and English Mennonite Church there would not express an opinion on the case without hearing both sides. "If," say they, "John Murton or somebody of his followers, comes to us with a kind heart and a manageable mind we shall be very glad to see him." As yet they had not heard his side of the case. Conferences and "reasonings" were had with Tookey's messengers, who were sent back to England bearing money and writings and a letter signed by the ministers, Hans de Ries and Renier Wybrant; this last the messengers for some reason withheld. The Dutch brethren had some discussion with the English messengers on the subject of the deity of Christ, and they refer to it in their letter in these terms:—

"When your messengers were here and we spoke with them, we declared then that those who have different opinions about the origin of the human body of Christ are esteemed among us as to be borne with, as they still belong to those who do not deny the humanity of Christ but confess that he is truly man. But if one would extend it so far, that we should esteem it excusable that somebody might deny the deity of Christ or denied that Christ was really God he would not understand us well but very

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wrongly. And, therefore, we hope it may please you to explain to us how we should understand your words 'We do not compel one to believe of Christ what we do, but bear with each other.' We desire to know whether this is only said of the origin of Christ's body, or whether it covers the article of the deity of Christ."

The letter closes with an indication that the Church at Amsterdam was disposed to admit Tookey and his friends to their brotherhood on receiving a satisfactory answer to the points here raised.

The brethren in London took time to consider their reply, which was eventually written by Elias Tookey, subscribed, "your kind and sincere friends eighteen in number living in London, March 17, 1625," and addressed "to the holy and discreet elders Hans de Ries and Renier Wybrant." In this letter it is admitted that there were differences of opinion amongst them, but say they, "we can bear with each other in peace," and the belief is expressed that such "Christian tolerance" is a better preservative against discord in the Church than "minute examinations, limitations, censures and condemnations only for opinion." This is a familiar belief to-day, but it was singular and remarkable when it was enunciated by this little group of Anabaptists.

The three points of the deity of Christ, the oath, and war, wherein the Dutch found the chief obstacles of union with these English Anabaptists, are each handled in this letter. The Englishmen express themselves as holding the same opinion as the Mennonites upon the deity of Christ "unless," they add, "you would compel us to believe three different persons in the Deity which manner of speaking is not found in the Scriptures." As regards the oath and war, they were not prepared to take up the

## Lawful to Bear Arms

position of the Mennonites who absolutely forbade them. A few were ready to accept the Mennonite belief on these two points, but the majority held that the taking of an oath and bearing arms were legitimate in some circumstances, though not in a spiritual cause. It was recognized that this difference of opinion rendered their chance of being admitted to communion with the Amsterdam Church somewhat doubtful, and so the letter concludes:—

“ If you can admit us . . . we shall be very glad ; but if you cannot admit us, we will wait till God gives us, in our hearts what it may please him ; and we shall expect that he will work in us the desire to bear with each other though we differ in opinions it may be in the above mentioned affairs, or in others which do not tend to the destruction of true Christianity.”

Whether negotiations were continued with the Dutch by Elias Tookey and his party does not appear, but their action seems to have led to an attempt on the part of the main body of Anabaptists (from which Tookey was excluded) to resume intercourse with the kindred Church in Amsterdam. On November 13, 1626, two delegates visited Cornelius Aresto, minister of the United Waterland Church in Amsterdam. They represented “ the Churches of Jesus Christ in England, living in London, Lincoln, Sarum, Coventry and Tiverton ” and bore a letter addressed to Hans de Ries and Renier Wybrant. The delegates are not named but they are spoken of as “ beloved friends and brethren—men that are approved among us and have proved their constancy and faithfulness to the cause of Christ by continually suffering a long and troublesome captivity almost to their whole ruin.” Hans de Ries was now

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minister at Alkmaar, consequently Aresto sent a letter on to him announcing the arrival of these two Englishmen and asking how to proceed. "We have delayed them," he says, "and meanwhile ordered our English to show them our last answer to Elias Tookey." He also notes that "these count a number in England of undoubtedly 150 persons . . . and belong to the people of John Murton and Thos. Denys."

The letter carried by these deputies was a long and well considered communication. The writers express their desire for unity, and for this reason resume attempts made in former years for peace and union "though the most principal among us are now dead and rest with the Lord." They then pass on to an examination of the Confession of Faith issued by the Mennonites, a copy of which had been sent them. This confession was practically the same as that drawn up and submitted to John Smith and his company many years before. The English Anabaptist Churches found themselves in general agreement with the doctrinal parts of the confession but they expressly stipulated for the retention within "the society of true believers" of those who did not believe that Christ "assumed his substance from Mary." The main part of the letter is concerned with differences upon points of practice. The English took the Lord's Supper every Sunday and held it to be legitimate for ordinary brethren with the consent of the Church to preach, convert and administer the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper when the "bishops" or "elders" were not present. This was contrary to the practice of the Mennonites. In regard to the oath, magistracy, and the use of arms, the English also took



## Weekly Communion Service

their own line. They would not absolutely condemn them, holding that they had a useful place in the world, though no place in the "spiritual kingdom or church of the New Testament." In conclusion they say, "We pray you to consider earnestly all these differences and to write to us, after that consideration, whether you could suffer us, as we can suffer you in these matters that we may then be together as members of one body, of which Christ is the head."

Hans de Ries drew up a list of searching questions to be put before the deputies from the five Churches in England. In some of these the echo of past disputes is to be detected, *e.g.*, "Whether they think them worthy to be excommunicated that came from England and took up their residence here; and think that they who live here are obliged to live again in England?"

The desired union was not consummated. The reason is disclosed in a letter written from Tiverton by James Joppe<sup>1</sup> and Isabel his wife in 1631. Joppe had visited Holland and had already corresponded with the Church there. He and the friends at Tiverton had received a letter from Amsterdam dated September 13, 1630. From Joppe's reply we gather that the Dutch brethren declared that the fault was on the English side as regards the failure to effect a union, because some of them kept and used the material sword, "You will not," he says, "allow us to have any community with you unless we forsake all offices of government or authority and the use of the material sword." Joppe contends that these things are allowable "according to

<sup>1</sup> A certain John Joope was a member of Henoeh Clapham's Separatist Church—"the Visible Catholic and Apostolic Church"—at Amsterdam in 1598. See Clapham's *Sin against the Holy Ghost*.

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our duty to the king and to the country in which we live and in all civil things which are lawful . . . nevertheless we say also that if there were never an occasion to use the sword it were much better." The letter concludes :—

"We offer you our kind and sincere greeting, also your wife and the other beloved friends living with you, namely Alexander Hodgkin, John Drew, with their wives, and all others—not forgetting the four elders, whom you should inform, the contents of this letter and that of the other written by our beloved friends at Lincoln. The Lord lead you always in the truth. Amen."

The John Drew<sup>1</sup> here named had been the bearer of a general letter in 1630 to the Church at Lincoln "and the others of our brethren among this nation." This letter remonstrated with the English for excommunicating brethren who occasionally resorted to the parish churches to listen to the preaching. The attitude taken up by the English Anabaptists upon this point reveals a certain hardness and narrowness from which the Mennonites were free. "You think it better to bear with such," says Joppe, "and thus to bear with those that are evil, for which fact we think that you are guilty, and that the cause comes from your side that there be no unity between us. If we had known that you had such opinions when we asked for union with you, we should first have worked at your reformation." The policy of Laud had engendered a singular bitterness of feeling against the Church of England.

<sup>1</sup> He, with his brothers Alexander and Joseph, belonged to the English section of the Waterland Church at Amsterdam. Joseph Drew was proposed by the consistory as minister on July 8, 1640, and accepted the office on December 8, *Evans' Baptists*, i., 223. It is worth notice that a "Mr. Draw of Lincoln" intervened on John Smith's behalf with the Bishop of Lincoln in the Spring of 1603. Cf. *Act Book of Bishop's Court* fo. 40b.

## English Anabaptists.

No further correspondence between these Churches has survived, but these scanty remains show us that the Anabaptists were already gathered into distinct Churches in widely separated parts of the Kingdom and kept in touch with one another by letter.

The Mennonite Church at Amsterdam accepted English Anabaptist refugees into membership on presenting a satisfactory personal confession of faith without a fresh baptism. As late as September 26, 1630, there is a record of five persons being admitted "because they were baptized formerly by Mr. Smith."

It may be inferred that the intensity of the persecution in England at this period led some of the English Anabaptists to flee a second time to Holland.

## CHAPTER XXV

THE PILGRIM FATHERS—PLYMOUTH PLANTATION—  
THE PURITAN EXODUS — INFLUENCE OF THE  
IDEAS OF SMITH AND ROBINSON ON THE PURITAN  
COLONISTS—ROGER WILLIAMS—FIRST BAPTIST  
CHURCH IN AMERICA — REACTION OF NEW  
ENGLAND CHURCH POLITY ON ENGLISH PURITANS  
—CONCLUSION.

WHILE Murton and his friends were spreading their beliefs in the old country by means of books and "apostles" sent out to places where a hearing was likely to be given, a company of Robinson's Church had gone out from Leyden under the leadership of their elder, William Brewster, to found a home in a new land. The idea of making a plantation in America, where the Separatists could work and worship in peace, had long been entertained. We saw that the plan occurred to Francis Johnson and his friends as early as 1597. Of the two vessels fitted out for the expedition which he joined, one was "appointed to winter" on the American side of the Atlantic to help the projected settlement. But that strange venture landed Johnson in the end at Amsterdam. No settlement was then made, yet the plan was borne in mind. After the death of Johnson (January, 1618) a goodly number of the members of his Church prepared to go to Virginia

## The Good Ship "Mayflower"

under the lead of their elder, Francis Blackwell. The expedition was grossly mismanaged. They were overcrowded. "It is said there was in all a hundred and eighty persons in the ship so as they were packed together like herrings."<sup>1</sup>

It was towards winter in the year 1618 when they sailed from Gravesend, and it was not till March that they made their haven. They ran short of fresh-water and suffered from "the flux," so that there died "a hundred and thirty persons one and another in the ship." It must have been a terrible experience. Yet news of this disaster did not daunt the members of Robinson's Church, who were already planning to transport themselves to the northern coast of Virginia. They pushed on steadily with their negotiations for a charter and preparations for their venture. One by one the many difficulties in their way were surmounted. At the last, they had to leave the *Speedwell* behind. She was not in fit trim for the voyage. But the *Mayflower* weathered the ocean storms and made her landfall safely at Cape Cod. With remarkable tenacity the planters held on with their project until at length the colony of Plymouth, New England, was firmly established.

The pilgrims carried with them the principles of Church government originally drawn out into orderly form for their guidance by John Smith at Gainsborough and Amsterdam. They were members of a Church constituted by covenant. They and their brethren in Leyden were still one Church. John Robinson was still their pastor, and in his absence they did not venture to administer the ordinances of the Lord's Supper and

<sup>1</sup> Letter of Robert Cushman in *Young's Chronicles*, p. 70.

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baptism, which were regarded as belonging peculiarly to the ministerial and pastoral office. They could, however, enjoy meetings for worship and praise. Preaching was not thought of as a duty solely incumbent on the ministry. It was held that any Church member having a gift in this direction ought to exercise it for the good of the Church. With men of the stamp of Brewster, Bradford and Winslow in the society the pilgrims would not suffer from any lack of helpful preaching full of homely good sense and practical wisdom. As for marriages, the Separatists never regarded them as Church actions but as civil contracts. Their residence in Holland had confirmed them in this conviction. So, though their Church lacked the presence of its pastor, there was felt to be no difficulty in marrying. The marriage was made in due and proper form before the governor in the presence of witnesses.

Plymouth Plantation was weak in numbers and poor in resources and its progress was only slow. Still, it had a fine heroic quality about it which gave it distinction. It demonstrated in face of a sea of troubles that it was possible for Englishmen to gain a livelihood in the new land. The fortunes of this little colony were eagerly watched by the Puritans at home. It was recognized that the pilgrims were breaking the ice for others. A place of refuge for those harassed by the bishops on account of their nonconformity was to be desired. Englishmen were entering upon an acute struggle for constitutional liberty. The high hopes with which men welcomed the accession of Charles to the throne in 1625 were soon dashed, for it became clear that he was as much opposed to government by means



## To the West, the Land of the Free

of Parliament as his father before him. The way of reform in Church and State seemed blocked. The grievances of the people remained unredressed. It was time to look round for some place of abode where men could put the ideals which stirred their hearts into practical shape in life. The thought of a great Puritan colony in the West gradually took form in the minds of many in the old country. John White (1575—1648), of Dorchester, was a great promoter of the scheme; it was taken up by others in Lincolnshire, London, Suffolk and other parts. A "Company of Massachusetts Bay" was formed and a great stream of emigrants of good standing began to flow steadily to the West. The pace was quickened when it became evident, after the abortive Parliament of 1629, that Charles was determined to rule without consulting the wishes of his people. For eleven years no Parliament was summoned and the feeling of uneasiness under the King's personal rule grew deeper as the years passed.

When Archbishop Abbott died in August, 1633, William Laud was at once appointed to his place. Men knew then, if they had not known before, that there was no possibility of peace for the Puritans within the borders of the Anglican Church. Laud had the strength and the weakness of a man of great gifts with all his powers centred upon one single object. Everything sank into unimportance before the realization of his one aim of fashioning the Anglican Church according to his mind. His policy accelerated the flow of religious refugees to New England. But with his restless energy Laud even sought to disturb and control them in matters of religion in their new home. He was alert

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

enough to see some of the consequences to the Church in England from the setting up of Churches in a "new way" on the far side of the Atlantic free from episcopal control. There would be a re-action from New England upon ecclesiastical affairs in the old country. When Edward Winslow was over in England on the business of the Colony in 1635, Laud actually committed him to the Fleet prison because he had used his gift of preaching in the Church at Plymouth and had married some of those in the Plantation in virtue of his office of magistrate.

The Puritan settlers had left England with some prejudice against the Church of New Plymouth on account of its leaning to Brownism and Separation, but in the event the Churches which they themselves set up followed much the same lines as that of the Old Colony. Robinson was amply justified in his prophecy that the Puritans would frame their Churches on the pattern that he had followed if they ever secured liberty to erect them. A closer acquaintance with the Church at New Plymouth and its leading members removed the prejudices that lurked in the Puritan mind against it. The common needs and dangers of the Colonists drew them together. John Endicott wrote to William Bradford in cordial terms from Salem in 1629, after Deacon Samuel Fuller had been over from Plymouth to help the new-comers in a time of sickness. "I acknowledge myself," he says, "much bound to you for your kind love and care in sending Mr. Fuller amongst us, and rejoice much that I am by him satisfied touching your judgment of the outward form of God's worship; it is, as far as I can gather, no other than is warranted by

## The Puritan Exodus

the evidence of truth, and the same which I have professed and maintained ever since the Lord in mercy revealed himself unto me, being far from the common report that hath been spread of you touching that particular.”<sup>1</sup>

On June 22, 1629, the good ship *George* arrived in Salem harbour bearing part of that Puritan company sent over to colonize the Bay of Massachusetts. She was followed seven days later by the *Talbot*, accompanied by the *Lion's Whelp* of less tonnage, but “a neat and nimble ship.” The organizers of the expedition in England had been careful to send over ministers to serve the colonists. Arthur Hildersham had been consulted as to the choice of one suited for the work, and endorsed the selection of Francis Higginson, then labouring in Leicester as “lecturer,” for one; Samuel Skelton, harassed for his nonconformity in Lincolnshire, and already known to Governor Endicott, was another; Francis Bright was the third. They were ordained clergy of the Anglican Church, but the two former were strongly averse from the ceremonies imposed by authority in that Church, and had suffered for their convictions. But there went over in these ships, besides the Puritan planters, thirty-five members of the Leyden Church and their families on their way to join their fellow members at Plymouth. There was also a certain Ralph Smith, a minister of Separatist principles, who was granted permission to sail by the “company” before they “understood of his difference in judgment in some things” from their ministers.

Ralph Smith and the friends from Leyden improved

<sup>1</sup> Letter in Morton's *New England Memorial*, sub anno 1629.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

the opportunity which the voyage afforded of explaining their ideas of Church polity to their Puritan companions. Higginson and Smith were together in the *Talbot*, and we find them both taking part in a special day of "fast" on the voyage. The close companionship on shipboard would count for something in the way of softening asperities and removing misunderstandings. However that may be, when this company of planters had been in the land barely a month order was taken for setting up a reformed Church. Higginson and Skelton did not exercise their ministry in the new colony in virtue of their episcopal ordination. Though they frowned upon separation from the Church of England, they were resolved upon separating from its corruptions, and "came over with a profound intention of practising Church reformation."

It was precisely here, in the settling of a reformed congregation, that the influence of the Plymouth example made itself felt. The first steps in the way of reform are described in a vivid letter from Charles Gott to Governor Bradford, dated Salem, July 30, 1629. Gott and his wife had experienced great kindness from Bradford when at Plymouth. He writes as one in sympathy with the polity of the Pilgrim Church. He tells how Governor Endicott set apart the 20th July "for a solemn day of humiliation for the choice of a pastor and teacher." The persons thought of for these offices were Higginson and Skelton, "who were demanded concerning their callings; they acknowledged there was a two-fold calling, the one an inward calling, when the Lord moved the heart of man to take that calling upon him, and fitted him with gifts for the same; the second,

## The Example of Plymouth Church

the outward calling, was from the people." They further allowed that "when a company of believers are joined together in covenant to walk together in all the ways of God, every member (being men) are to have a free voice in the choice of their officers." They were moving to the position maintained by the Church at Leyden and Plymouth. The godly men among the new colonists therefore, being satisfied as to the fitness of the candidates, elected Skelton to be pastor and Higginson teacher. They were there and then solemnly ordained with laying-on of hands and prayer. Gott reporting these proceedings to Governor Bradford says : "Now, good sir, I hope that you and the rest of God's people (who are acquainted with the ways of God) with you will say that here was a right foundation laid, and that these two blessed servants of the Lord came in at the door and not at the window."

Whether the friends at Plymouth passed any criticism upon this procedure or no, does not appear, but it is remarkable that before the people at Salem completed the work of organizing their religious society they advanced yet another step nearer to the policy of the Separatist Church at Plymouth. It will be remembered that in the case of the Gainsborough and Scrooby Churches, the several members first joined themselves together in Church fellowship by a mutual covenant, and *afterwards* proceeded to elect and ordain ministers and officers. This method of forming the Church was now apparently discussed at Salem. The godly members of the colony were not themselves in Church order when they elected and ordained pastor and teacher on July 20. This defect ought to be remedied, for it

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

invalidated their minister's standing. As it happened, they had deferred the ordination and full election of ruling elders and deacons from July 20 "to see if it pleased God to send more able men over," as fresh ships to reinforce the colony were daily expected; they had therefore contented themselves with nominating one or two for those offices, and then adjourned the business.

The new point as to the right way of constituting the Church having arisen in the meantime, another special day (August 6, 1629) was appointed to set all things in order. Francis Higginson drew up by request a confession of faith and covenant, which was owned on the appointed day by thirty persons, to whom copies had been supplied. Thus the first Christian Church actually constituted in New England was set up. Skelton and Higginson were ordained over again, and the business of appointing and ordaining a ruling elder and deacons for the Church was proceeded with. To this function Bradford and others from Plymouth Church were invited, but they "coming by sea were hindered by cross winds that they could not be there at the beginning of the day, but they came into the assembly afterward and gave them the right hand of fellowship, wishing all prosperity and a blessed success unto such good beginnings." From the very outset, therefore, the Church at Plymouth had Christian fellowship with the Churches of New England,<sup>1</sup> set up by the Puritan refugees, and had a

<sup>1</sup> The following extract is illuminating:—"Mr. Hildersam did much grieve when he understood that the Brethren in New England did depart from the Presbyterian Government, and he said: 'This mischief had been prevented if my counsel at Mr. Higginson's going over had been taken, which was that brethren driven thither by Episcopal persecution should agree upon the Church Government before they depart from hence.' And it is well-known that many Presbyterian non-conformists



## Gainsborough Covenant Adopted

marked influence in determining their Church polity. In this way the work of John Smith and John Robinson, despised and rejected at home, was bearing fruit in the West. This is confirmed by Edward Winslow in his "Briefe Narration of 1646," in which he tells how the Church at Plymouth when consulted by the new-comers gave its warrant "from the book of God" for every point in their practice. "Which being by them well weighed and considered, they also entered into covenant with God and one another to walk in all his ways revealed or as they should be made known unto them, and to worship him according to his will revealed in his written word only, etc."<sup>1</sup> Here we have the covenant of Smith's Church at Gainsborough adopted in its essential features by the Puritan refugees in New England. Roger Williams was well within the mark when he said of John Cotton, of Boston,<sup>2</sup> "I am sure Mr. Cotton hath made some use of those principles and arguments on which Mr. Smith and others went concerning the constitution of the Christian Church."

The memory of John Smith's teaching and life was preserved in New England by those who had companied with him in earlier days.<sup>3</sup> It is not unlikely that Roger Williams, the founder of the first Baptist Church in America, was influenced through this channel by John

did by a letter sent unto New England bewaile their departing in practice (as they heard) from the way of Church Government which they owned here." *Epistle* "to the judicious reader" in *Irenicum or an Essay towards a brotherly peace and union between those of the Congregational and Presbyterian Way.* Lond., 1659.

<sup>1</sup> Winslow's Narration in *Young's Chronicles*, p. 387.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Cotton's letter examined and answered by Roger Williams, 1644, chap. 9.

<sup>3</sup> "I understand by such as lived in those parts at that time [that] Smith lived in Amsterdam and there died, and at Leyden in Holland he never came." Cotton's *Way of Congregational Churches*, p. 7.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

Smith's work. He had probably heard of Smith in Lincolnshire before leaving for America, but now he had an opportunity of conversing with those who had been intimately associated with him and were well aware of his opinions. The two men seem to me to have had much in common, and in some respects they ran a parallel course. Williams,<sup>1</sup> like Smith, was a Cambridge man, having been educated at Pembroke College and graduating B.A. in 1626. Before leaving England he had advanced beyond the position of the average Puritan, and would have absolutely nothing to do with the Book of Common Prayer. He was then a rigid Separatist, like Smith during his Gainsborough period. He too became an exile on account of religion, sailing with his wife from Bristol on December 1, 1630 in the *Lion* under that stedfast friend of the Plymouth Pilgrims, Captain William Pierce. After a stormy passage, they at last made Boston harbour on February 5, 1631. He was soon asked to supply the place of one of the pastors of the Church at Boston, but this Church had not in his judgment renounced its connection with the Church of England with sufficient clearness; he replied that he did not "dare officiate to an unseparated people." There was less ambiguity about the Church in Salem and he accepted an invitation to minister to that society for a time.

In all men of originality there is an element of surprise. As in the case of Smith, so in the case of Williams men were startled and perplexed by some of the singular

<sup>1</sup> Conjectured to be the son of James Williams, merchant taylor, of London and his wife Alice. Entered Pembroke College, June 29, 1623. Married Mary Warnard. In 1629 chaplain to Sir Wm. Masham, in Essex. His eldest daughter Mary born at New Plymouth, 1633.

## Williams at Plymouth

opinions he vented. He early protested against the tendency in New England to identify Church and State and make civic rights dependent upon Church membership. The 'Church' in his opinion was a holy and sacred society separated entirely from the world. So holy were all its spiritual and religious actions (and he counted the taking an oath as a religious act) that no unregenerate person ought to be allowed or required to participate in them. To do so was to debase religion which, in its expression, should be voluntary and spontaneous. Together with this high doctrine of the sanctity of the gathered Church Roger Williams held firmly to the principle of religious liberty for all citizens who did not endanger the good of the commonwealth. These views made him obnoxious to some in Salem, so he moved on to Plymouth.

Of Williams in the Old Colony, Bradford gives a kindly account. "Roger Williams," he says, "a man godly and zealous, having many precious parts, but very unsettled in judgment, came over first to the Massachusetts, upon some discontent left the place and came hither where he was freely entertained according to our poor ability, and exercised his gifts among us and after some time was admitted a member of the church and his teaching well approved, for the benefit whereof I still bless God and am thankful to him even for his sharpest admonitions and reproofs so far as they agree with the truth."

Williams remained here for nearly three years. During that time he would have ample opportunity of inquiring into the origin of the Plymouth Church and learning something of its history, principles and founders. He here gained a fuller knowledge of John

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

Smith's opinions, "although<sup>1</sup> I knew him not," he says, "and have heard of many points in which my conscience tells me it pleased the Lord to leave him to himself: yet I have also heard by some whose testimony Mr. Cotton will not easily refuse, that he was a man fearing God."

At Plymouth we are told that Roger Williams was "well accepted as an assistant in the ministry to Mr. Ralph Smith, then pastor of the church there, but by degrees venting of divers of his own singular opinions and seeking to impose them upon others he, not finding such a concurrence as he expected, desired his dismissal to the church of Salem." Bradford tells us he left the friends at Plymouth "something abruptly." Being well received by his old associates at Salem and having an opportunity for useful service among them, he applied to the Church at Plymouth in which he stood as a member for "dismissal to the church at Salem." There were some unwilling to grant this request. There was an engaging and attractive element in Williams's character which drew men to him, and those who had become attached to him did not want to lose him from their fellowship. But Brewster with his long experience of men and affairs saw in him a similarity of disposition to his old acquaintance John Smith, and recognized that he had embarked on the same course of inquiry which had led Smith to renounce infant baptism and adopt the principles of full religious liberty. I dare say he told him so and this would make Williams all the more eager to understand exactly what John Smith's opinions were.

The course of events is thus detailed. "Through the

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Cotton's letter examined . . . by Roger Williams, 1644. See *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution*. Hans. Knollys Society, p. 391.

## William Brewster's Advice

prudent counsel of Mr. Brewster, the ruling elder there, fearing that his continuance amongst them might cause divisions and there being many abler men in the Bay they would better deal with him than themselves could, and foreseeing what he professed he feared concerning Mr. Williams which afterwards came to pass, that he would run the same course of rigid separation and anabaptistry which Mr. John Smith the se-baptist at Amsterdam had done, the church at Plymouth consented to his dismissal and such as did adhere to him were also dismissed, and removed with him, or not long after, to Salem." There were those therefore so devoted to him that they were prepared to follow him in order to enjoy his ministry and society. Samuel Skelton, pastor of Salem, died on August 2, 1634, and the Church shortly after called Williams to office and proceeded to ordain him in spite of a request from "the prudent magistrates of the Massachusetts jurisdiction" that they should not do so.

Differences soon arose between him and the magistrates. He spoke contemptuously of the King's Patent by which the Bay Colonists claimed right to the country. He argued that King Charles had no right to grant lands which belonged to the Indians, and that it was far better to obtain them by direct treaty and purchase without suing to the Crown. He spoke strongly for an absolute separation from the Church of England. He taught "that there should be a general and unlimited toleration of all religions and for any man to be punished for any matters of his conscience was persecution." These and other points in his teaching alarmed the ministers and magistrates of the Bay Colony. They were as yet

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

wholly unprepared for a full religious toleration. John Cotton was amazed that any one should say the civil magistrate ought not to interfere in a way of civil justice with Churches which fell into "arianism, papism, familism or other heresies." The colonial court accordingly pronounced sentence of banishment against Williams (October 9, 1635).<sup>1</sup> This course was taken as an act of self protection. Williams at once withdrew from all communion with the Churches in the Bay and began to make preparations for a new settlement which he had long had in mind where full religious liberty should be allowed. Meanwhile he held religious meetings with his friends and partisans at his own house "on the Lord's days in private." The authorities heard of his doings and the Court at Boston, on January 11, 1636, ordered his immediate deportation to England on a vessel then preparing to sail. Williams got wind of this order and, acting on a friendly hint from Governor Winthrop, quietly slipped away and steered his course for Narragansett Bay. After some wanderings and an abortive attempt at planting in Seekonk on the Pawtucket River, which he had to give up because he had there "fallen into the edge" of the bounds of Plymouth colony, he pitched near the mouth of the Mohassuck River where he founded the town of Providence. Here he bought land from the Indians. Here he maintained a place of refuge for the persecuted. Here he set up a civil state in which full freedom was allowed to all in the things of God. "I desired," he says "it might be for a shelter for persons distressed for conscience."

It speaks well for Williams that he was followed to

<sup>1</sup> *As to Roger Williams*, by Dexter, Boston, 1876, p. 144.



# The First Baptist Church in America

Providence "by<sup>1</sup> many of the members of the church at Salem, who did zealously adhere to him and who cried out of the persecution that was against him, some also resorted to him from other parts." In a few years' time he took another step which again reminds us of the case of John Smith. "They had not been long there together but from rigid separation they fell to anabaptistry renouncing the baptism which they had received in their infancy and taking up another baptism and so began a church in that way."<sup>2</sup> This was in March, 1639. The question of how they should assume baptism presented itself to them as it had done to Smith and Helwys in Holland. In America there were no known Baptists. Williams and his friends avoided the act of self-baptism which had brought such a storm of criticism upon John Smith by appointing Ezekiel Holliman, one of their number, to first baptize Mr. Williams, who then baptized Holliman and ten others. Thus the first American Baptist Church was set up.

Up to now the name of Roger Williams had been retained on the list of members of the Salem Church, but when news of his baptism came through to Salem the Church there, now under the care of Hugh Peters, excommunicated him and his wife with eight others. This was not the end of his religious progress. "Mr Williams stopped not there [in Anabaptism] long, for after some time he told the people that followed him and joined with him in a new baptism that he was out of the way himself, and had misled them, for he did not find that there was any upon earth that could administer

<sup>1</sup> *New England's Memorial*, sub anno 1629.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

baptism, and therefore their last baptism was a nullity, as well as their first, and therefore they must lay down all, and wait for the coming of new apostles; and so they dissolved themselves and turned Seekers, keeping that one principle, that every one should have liberty to worship God according to the light of their own consciences; but otherwise not owning any churches or ordinances of God anywhere upon earth.”<sup>1</sup>

In June, 1643, Williams visited England at the request of the people of Rhode Island and Providence to obtain a charter. He succeeded in this object, and secured a charter with wide powers on March 14, 1644, for the “Providence Plantations in the Narragansett Bay.” Under this charter a “democratical” civil government was set up by the colonists and religious liberty secured. This new state prospered under the wise and tolerant direction of Williams. His character ripened with the years, and he succeeded in winning the respect and esteem of former antagonists. At length the General Court of Boston revoked the sentence of banishment and removed the “sentence of restraint” which had debarred him from trading in the Bay Colony for many years.

When Williams came over to England in 1644 he sought out the friends of John Murton and Thomas Helwys. Like seeks like. When he visited the homeland a second time on colonial business, late in 1651, Williams made a longer stay, and on this occasion also sought out men of kindred mind, such as Thomas Harrison, John Milton and Henry Lawrence. Nor did he harbour any bitter feelings against Hugh Peters for

<sup>1</sup> *New England's Memorial*, sub anno 1629.

## Covenant or Baptism

the excommunication laid on him by Salem Church. He frequently went down to Lambeth to visit that trenchant political preacher who now held a foremost place in the Councils of the State. These men would talk together of the principles of religious liberty, and so the leaven spread and worked among an ever increasing number of English-speaking people. Returning to Providence in the summer of 1654, Williams continued in the colony till his death at a good old age in 1683. He was buried in a spot of his own choosing not far from where he first landed.

It is clear that out of the old Separatist movement of the time of Elizabeth and James there had issued two main streams of religious activity which now flowed on in different channels. On the one hand were the Churches which constituted themselves by means of a voluntary covenant, on the other hand were those which regarded baptism on confession of faith as the means for constituting a true Church and the way for admission to its fellowship. These two types were now represented on both sides of the Atlantic. In the origin of both John Smith, at different stages in his career, had taken a prominent part, and this was not entirely forgotten. We find one author when writing of Independency calling Smith "the great leader in this new way."<sup>1</sup> He had done pioneer work in the cause of Church reform according to the Independent model, and then "turned Anabaptist." Those are the words of Thomas Lambe, who first came into prominence through preaching to a Separatist congregation in his native

<sup>1</sup> Lambe, *Fresh Suite against Independency*, p. 37, quoted by Evans, i., p. 219. For Thos. Lambe, see the article in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, by Rev. A. Gordon.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

Colchester, where he would be in a position to get first-hand information as to Smith from those who had known him.

There was a close interaction between the New England Churches and the more advanced Puritans in Old England in the middle decades of the seventeenth century. The Puritans at home were surprised to find how closely the ministers of New England approached the positions taken up by John Robinson and John Smith. The pastors and teachers in New England were restricted to their own Churches for the performance of such ministerial acts as celebrating the Lord's Supper and baptism, though they were allowed to preach in other religious societies than their own, since preaching was not regarded as a peculiarly ministerial duty. This was the position of the Separatists. Our old friend "Master Bernard" sent over to the ministers in America some criticisms on their practice of requiring all Church members to engage in a "covenant," and the "Elders in New England" found a champion for their cause in Richard Mather (1596—1669) minister of Dorchester, New England, who sent back to Bernard in 1639 an "Apologie for Church Covenant." In the next year Mather replied on behalf of the "Elders of the severall Churches in New England" to two-and-thirty questions sent over "by divers ministers in England to declare their judgments" about "Church Government and Church Covenant." When Hugh Peters came back to England from Salem he put these treatises by Mather to the press.<sup>1</sup> The fourth question in this series

<sup>1</sup> *Church Government and Church Covenant discussed, etc.*, 1643, pp. 1-84 and 1-78.

## Independents and Baptists

touches on a point with which we have dealt in the preceding pages :—

“ Whethur you doe not hold that Baptisme rightly (for substance) partaked doth make them that are so Baptized members of the Visible Church, and so to have right (at least, quoad nos) to all the priviledges thereof (so farre as they are otherwise fit) until they be cast out (if they so deserve) by excommunication? ”

In the course of his reply to this question Mather shows that the New England ministers were well aware of the part played by Smith and Helwys in originating the English Baptist Church.

“ It is an opinion,”<sup>1</sup> he says, “ of the Anabaptists that the Church is made by Baptisme and therefore when they constitute or erect a Church they do it by being all of them baptized, which was the manner of Mr. Smith, Mr. Helwis and the rest of that company when they set up their Church. . . . But we do not believe that Baptisme doth make men members of the Church nor that it is to be administered to them that are without the Church as the way and means to bring them in, but to them that are within the Church as a seal to confirm the Covenant of God unto them.”

The two types of Church here indicated were by this time well known in the American Colonies, and also in Holland. Religious refugees returning to the motherland after the outbreak of the Civil War brought with them their new ideas of Church order, and reinforced the little companies of kindred souls which had bravely faced and weathered the storms of persecution at home. Having tasted the sweets of liberty they were in no mood to put their necks again under a yoke of bondage. They had experienced the holy joy of a voluntary submission to the easy yoke of Christ and a willing

<sup>1</sup> *Church Government and Covenant discussed*, p. 12.

## Smith, Helwys and Baptist Origins

obedience to his gracious discipline. Thus there sprang into being the two great sections of the Christian Church known as the Congregationalists and the Baptists. From small beginnings they have grown in numbers and influence. They have done a wholesome and helpful work in Christendom.

If the founders of those Churches were too absolute in their judgments and too certain that they had in their grip all the truth of God, that was a fault of their age. Men of strong conviction, resolute men, were needed to shake off the load of formality under which the Christian faith had in course of time been burdened. The evident sincerity of these men, their loyalty to conviction, their piety, their quick response to the calls of conscience, their passion for righteousness and their moral fervour, commend them to the loving regard of their successors. They must be judged by the standard of the times in which they lived and with reference to the circumstances in which they were placed. They contributed not a little to the development of both the civil and religious life of the English-speaking people. Their ideas in many directions were fruitful of beneficial results to the whole body politic when embodied in practical legislation.

Some of the rites and practices for which these pioneers contended as essential are now seen to be relatively unimportant. The two great Churches which honour them as shapers of their early history are steadily drawing closer together, allowing to the particular Churches in each section a wide liberty in ordering their own affairs. This does not mean that the work of those pioneers was labour lost. It means that men have moved on to a different stage in the history of religious



## A Fresh Outlook

thought, whence the outlook is far more extensive than in the seventeenth century, and where matters relating to Church order are seen in a different perspective. New problems concerning the application of Christian principles to the social life of man are rising into view, new channels for the working of religious forces are being opened up. But the present springs out of the past. The work of one age rests upon all that has been accomplished in preceding times. From a contemplation of the past, heart and hope may be drawn for the work of to-day. The Anabaptist visionary pointed to a better social order for the common man. The task of giving actuality to that vision in these days absorbs the religious energies of many of the finest minds amongst us. Though our outlook is different from that of the early Separatists, we none the less honour the memory of such men as John Smith and John Robinson, Thomas Helwys and Richard Clifton, John Murton and Roger Williams. They were men of vision. In some respects their vision was narrow, but it was intense and compelling. According to the measure of light that was given to them they were valiant workers for the Kingdom of God.



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The books and documents referred to in the foregoing pages are sufficiently indicated in the text and notes. The reprint of John Robinson's works, edited by Robert Ashton, 3 vols., 1851, has been cited for convenience, though original copies have been consulted on vital points. The edition of Daniel Neal's *History of the Puritans*, edited by Toulmin, in 5 vols., 1822, has been used. Thomas Crosby's *History of the Baptists*, 4 vols., dates various, contains much valuable material. *The Early English Baptists*, by Benjamin Evans, 2 vols., 1862, is helpful for the period treated in this book.



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